NEW

Doctors of Death

Horrors of the Empire

Jack the Ripper

THE DARK HISTORY of the VICTORIANS

From opium dens to freak shows, discover the sinister side of Victorian life

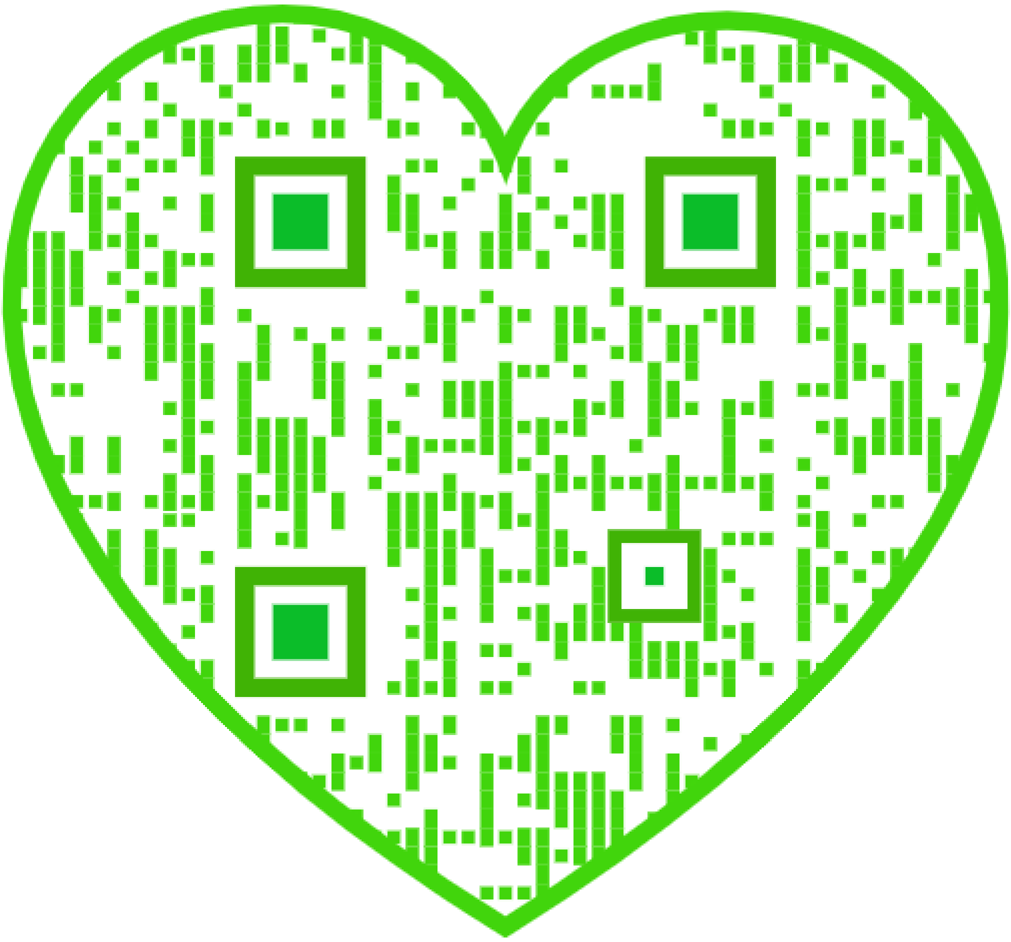
Birth of the Police

Rise of the Occult

Street Urchins

INCLUDING Morbid obsession with death · Mourning rituals · Killer beauty trends
Life inside the workhouse · The golden age of poison

Digital Edition
FUTURE
SECOND EDITION

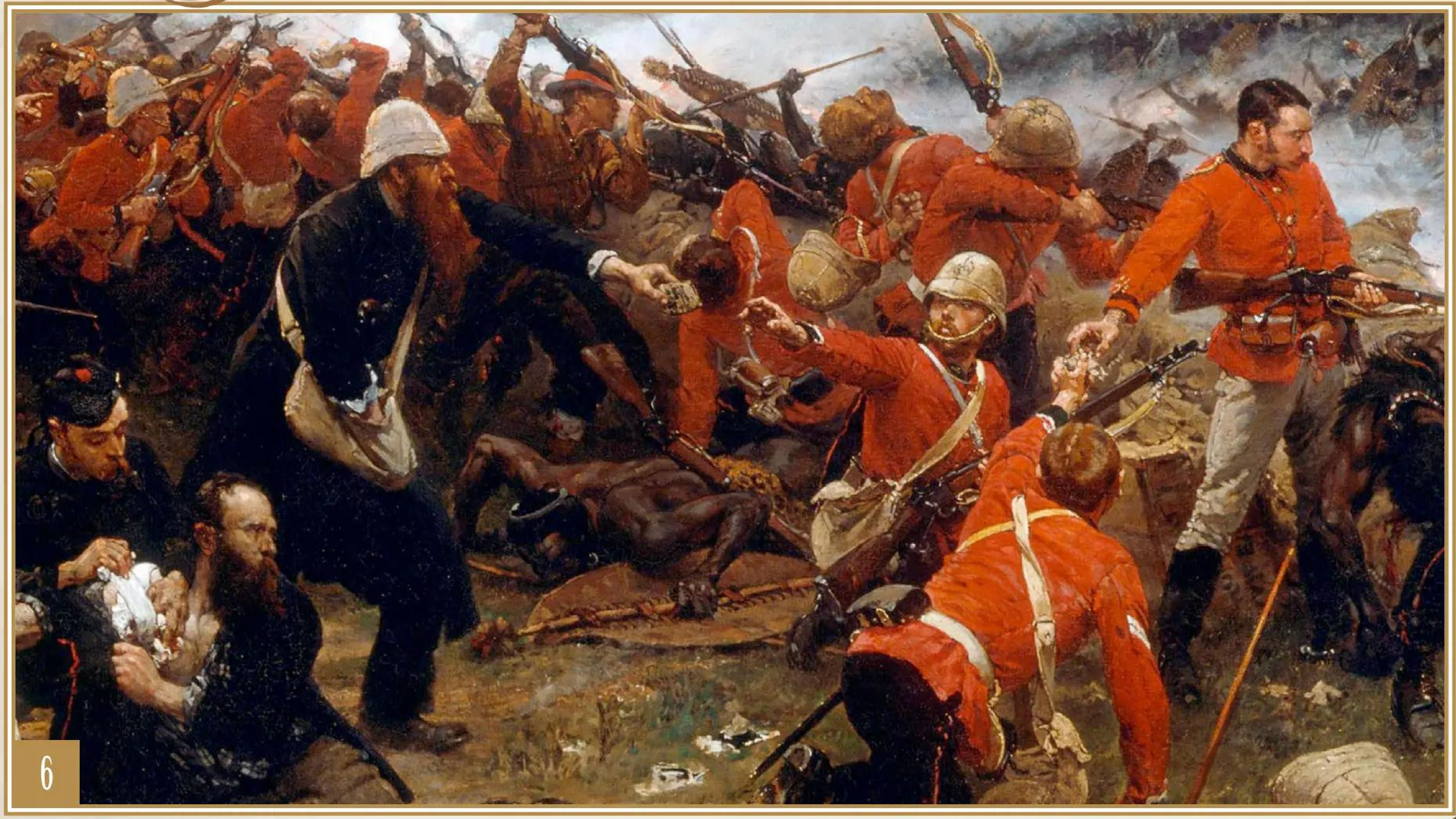


V

WELCOME

Pull back the curtain on the prudish Victorians and uncover their deepest, darkest secrets... From the morbid obsession with death and the strict mourning rituals to the terrifying criminal underworld of 19th-century Britain, explore the reality of Victorian life that the history books glossed over. Find out how behind the imposing, picture-perfect promenades of London lurked disease, deprivation and despair for the city's poorest denizens, and discover the atrocities committed in the name of the British Empire.

CONTENTS



6

6 ✧ **Horrors of the British Empire**
How Britannia ruled the waves with an iron fist

12 ✧ **Shamrock suffering**
During the 19th century, Ireland entered a troubled union with Great Britain and endured a terrible famine that changed the country forever

18 ✧ **Pride, prejudice and persecution**
What did the Victorians really think about race, sex and religion?

24 ✧ **Slumming it**
Far from being paved with gold, the streets of Victorian London were teeming with dirt, despair, disenfranchisement and deprivation for the city's poorest inhabitants

30 ✧ **The Great Stink**
There was a horrible whiff around the Houses of Parliament in the summer of 1858 and for once, it was nothing to do with bad politicians

34 ✧ **All work and no pay**
A workhouse was more of a prison for the poor than a refuge – but how were workhouse inmates punished?

42 ✧ **It's Bedlam in here**
The Victorian asylum has become synonymous with torture and inhumane treatments, but was that really the case?

48 ✧ **Victorian medicine**
Discover how horror surgeries and bizarre theories matured into a modern science

58 ✧ **The birth of suffrage**
How everyday life for Victorian women created a catalyst for the first women's rights movements

64 ✧ **The Ugly Girl Papers**
A series of magazine articles in 1870s America aimed to help women avoid ugliness and achieve beauty – whatever the cost

18

68 Seen and not heard
For children, rules were strict and the punishments for breaking them were swift, harsh and zealous

74 Freaky fascinations
Lifting the lid on the weird and wonderful world that was the Victorian freak show

82 Victorian crime
While overseas the British Empire was flourishing, in London a grisly war was waging between the emerging criminal class and a fledgling police force

92 Into oblivion
Moral decay and debauchery in Victorian Britain's opium dens

98 The golden age of poisoning
The technical advances in Victorian chemistry meant that would-be murderers soon had a new and deadly array of easy-to-use weapons at their disposal

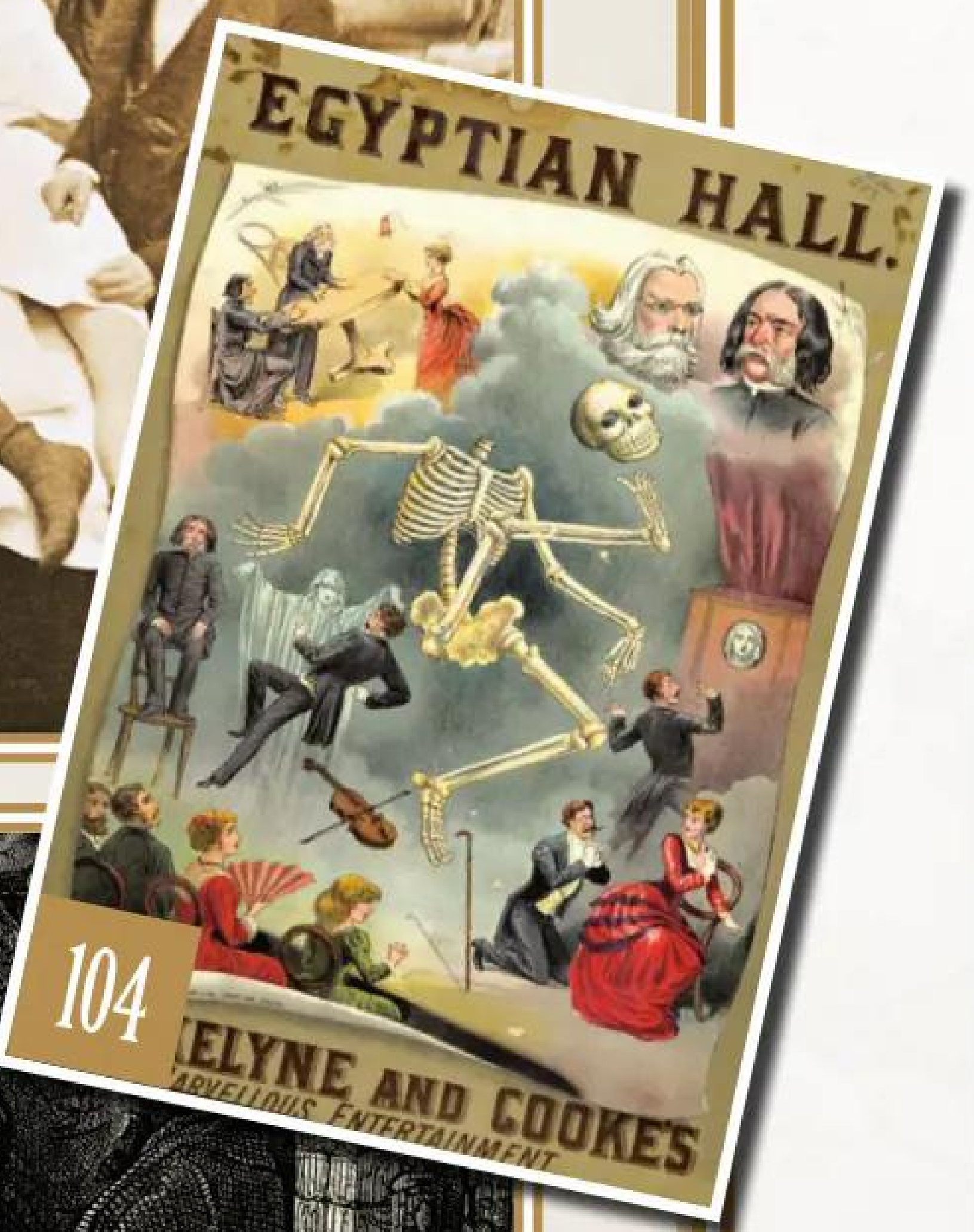
104 The Victorian cult of death
From superstitions to strange rituals, lift the veil on the macabre ways the Victorians dealt with mortality

112 Memento mori
Inside the creepy world of post-mortem photography

116 The mourner's handbook
Whether you lost a loved one or merely an associate, Victorian society imposed strict guidelines on grief

120 Rise of the occult
Lifting the shroud on the 19th century's obsession with death and the afterlife

48


104

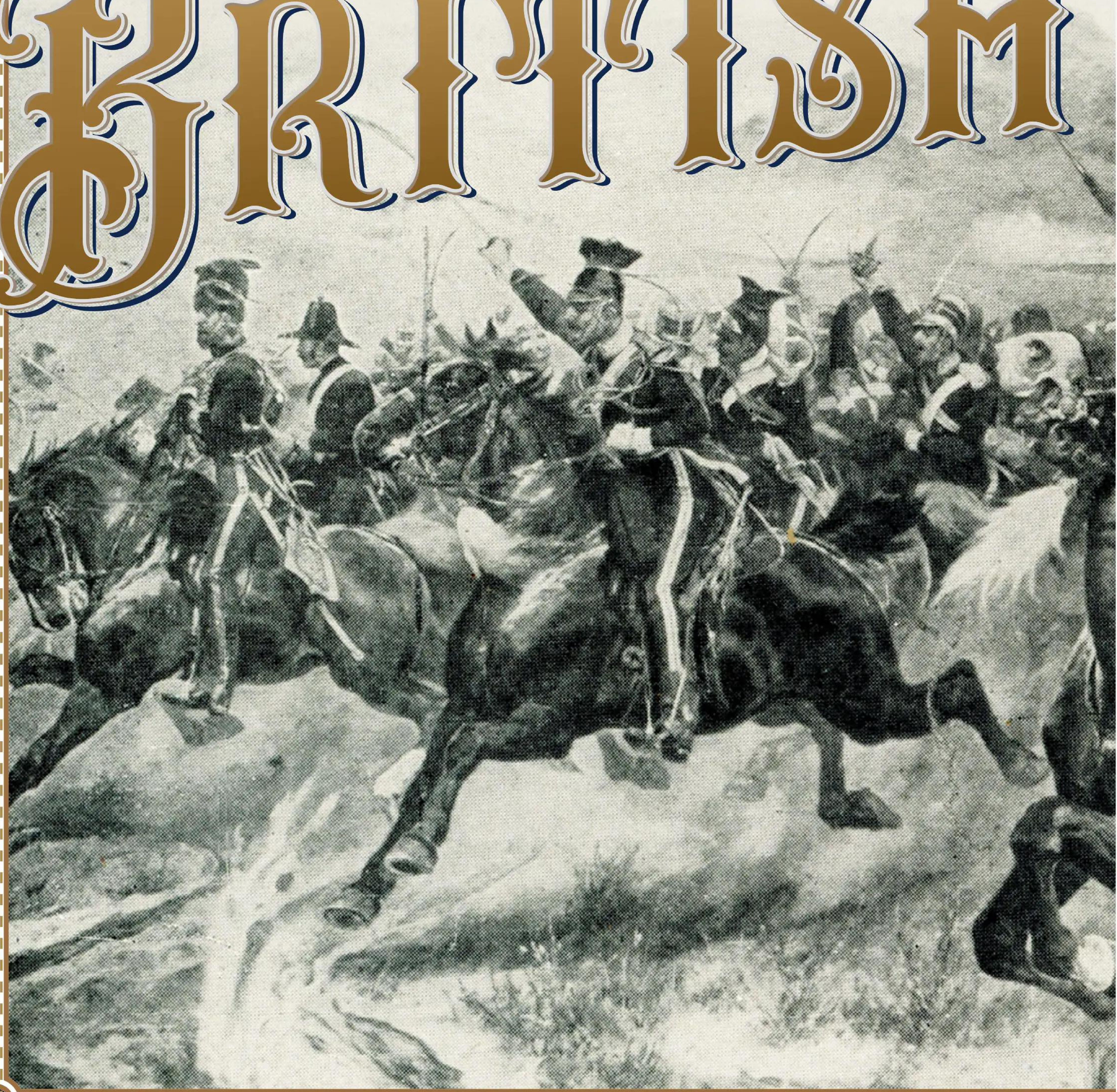
24

34

120

74
The Barnum & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth

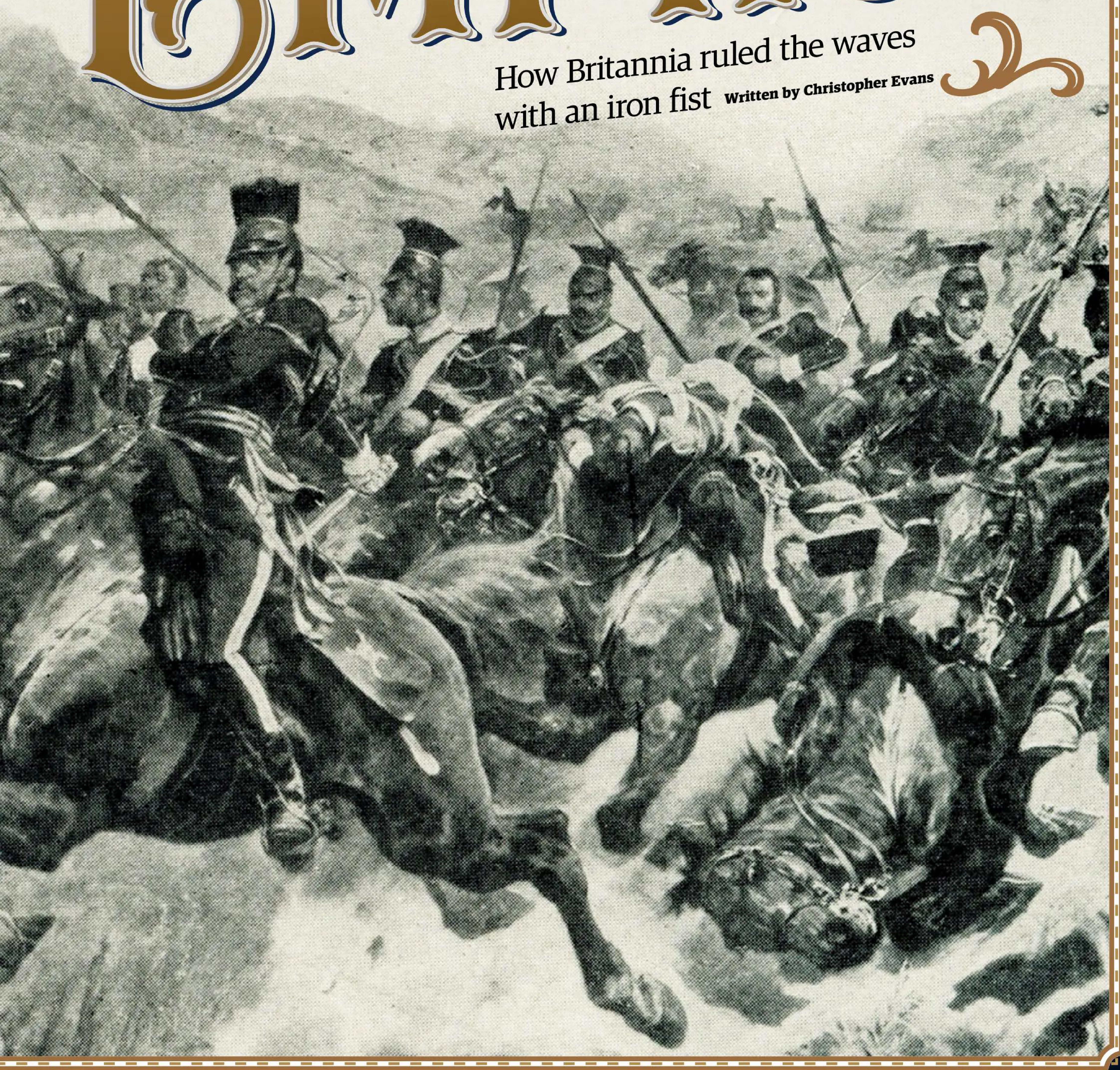
Horrors of the BRITISH



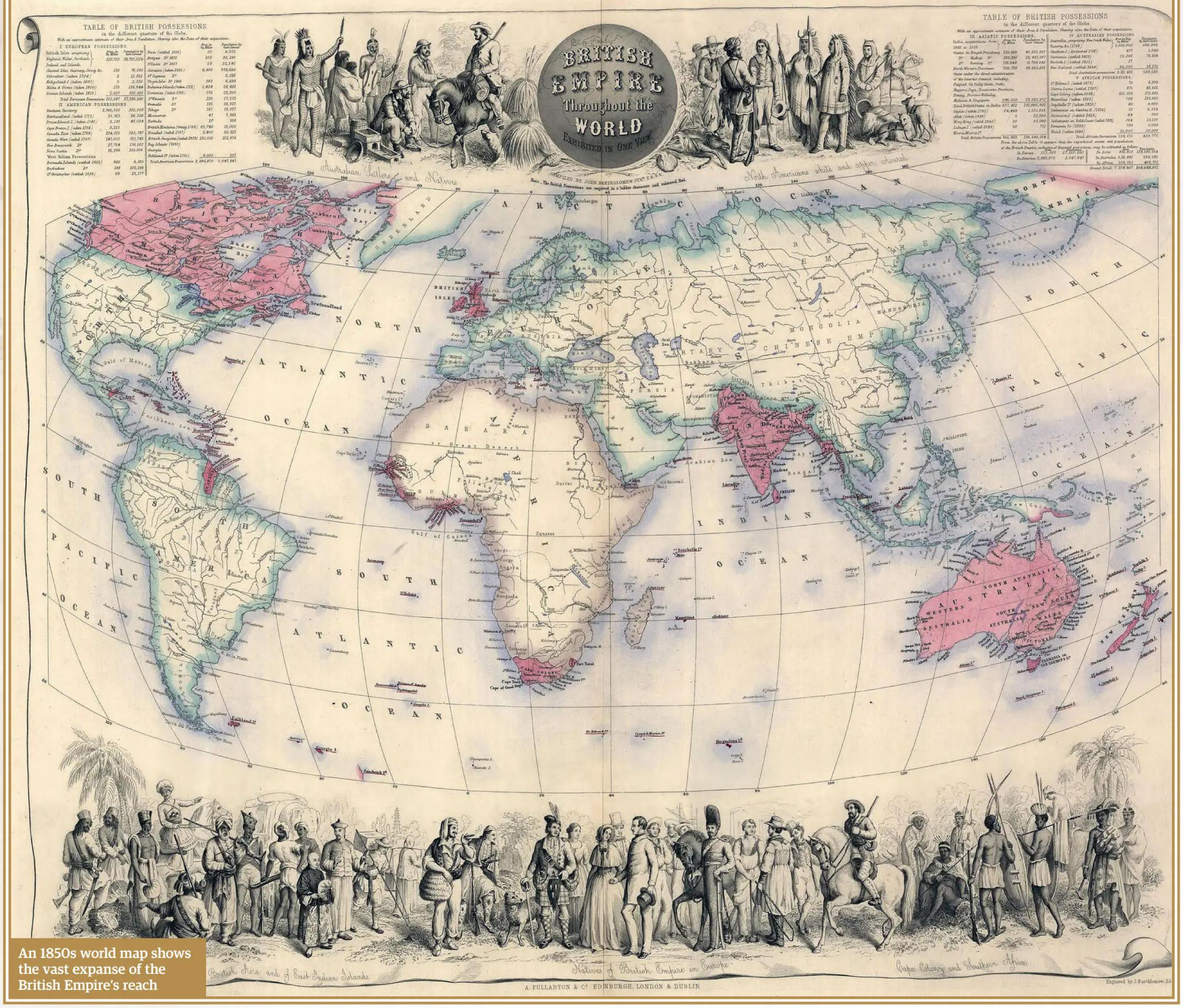
EMPIRE

How Britannia ruled the waves with an iron fist

Written by Christopher Evans



© Getty; Alamy


British Empire Throughout the World Exhibited in One View
Table of British Possessions
Australian Settlers and Natives
North Americans white and other coloured
British Asia and of East Indian Islands
Natives of British Empire in Europe
Cape Colony and Southern Africa
A. Fullarton & Co. Edinburgh, London & Dublin

An 1850s world map shows the vast expanse of the British Empire's reach

© Getty; Alamy

The British Empire was at its most powerful during the reign of Queen Victoria. Its growth and increase in power over this 64-year period saw it spread from a collection of trading colonies to ruling over almost a quarter of the world's population. So far was the Empire's reach across the globe that it was said the sun never set on it.

Due to the lightning-fast speed of the Industrial Revolution, Britain was a wealthy and prosperous nation, which allowed it the might it needed to plant the flag in North America, the Caribbean, India, Africa, and even Australia.

Whilst this expansion increased trade and saw money flow both ways around the world, the British Empire's thirst to grow, control and influence was not without wars, violence and, in many cases, extreme bloodshed.

First Afghan War

Worried about Russia's creeping influence towards India, a nation of great importance to the Empire, Britain decided to take action in what would be one of the earliest conflicts of the Victorian era, one that still has repercussions today.

Afghanistan had found itself in the middle of a cold war between the Empire and the Russian Tsar over land in Central Asia, and its leader, Dost Mohammed, was thought to be in league with the latter. To ensure the security of what the Empire considered its "jewel in the crown", Britain invaded Afghanistan in 1839 to dethrone and replace Dost Mohammed with a puppet who would act in their interests.

Initially successful, with Shah Shuja ruling Afghanistan on behalf of the British for the next two years, contempt for the occupiers began to grow. Discontent at rising taxes and inflation, to fund the Shah's lifestyle and feed the British forces, and local religious anger on the part of teetotal Muslims at the occupiers' constant drinking soon made the Empire's occupation incredibly shaky.

> "Britain invaded Afghanistan in 1839 to dethrone and replace Dost Mohammed with a puppet"

The son of the ousted leader Dost Mohammed rose up and, following an insurrection in 1841 that saw British political agent Sir William Hay Macnaghten killed, a hasty withdrawal was negotiated. The British gave up their gunpowder supplies in exchange for an Afghan escort, which would allow them to retreat safely. After being marched out of Kabul they soon discovered that this promised escort, along with much-needed food and fuel for the journey, was not going to appear.

Despite calls to turn back and take refuge, Sir William Elphinstone ordered the 4,500 British and Indian troops, as well as 12,000 camp followers, onward into the mountains.

As they struggled towards Jalalabad they came under siege from Afghan tribesmen. Outgunned, almost the entire convoy was wiped out in the ensuing massacre; very few survived to be captured and held hostage or sold into slavery. Reportedly only one man, surgeon William

Brydon, made it to safety to describe the ordeal of guiding his horse across a sea of bodies and blood.

In an effort to get the final word in what had been a disastrous four years, the British Empire sent an army in 1842 to rescue hostages and destroy the Kabul bazaar in what was seen as a final act of blazing retribution.

The Opium Wars

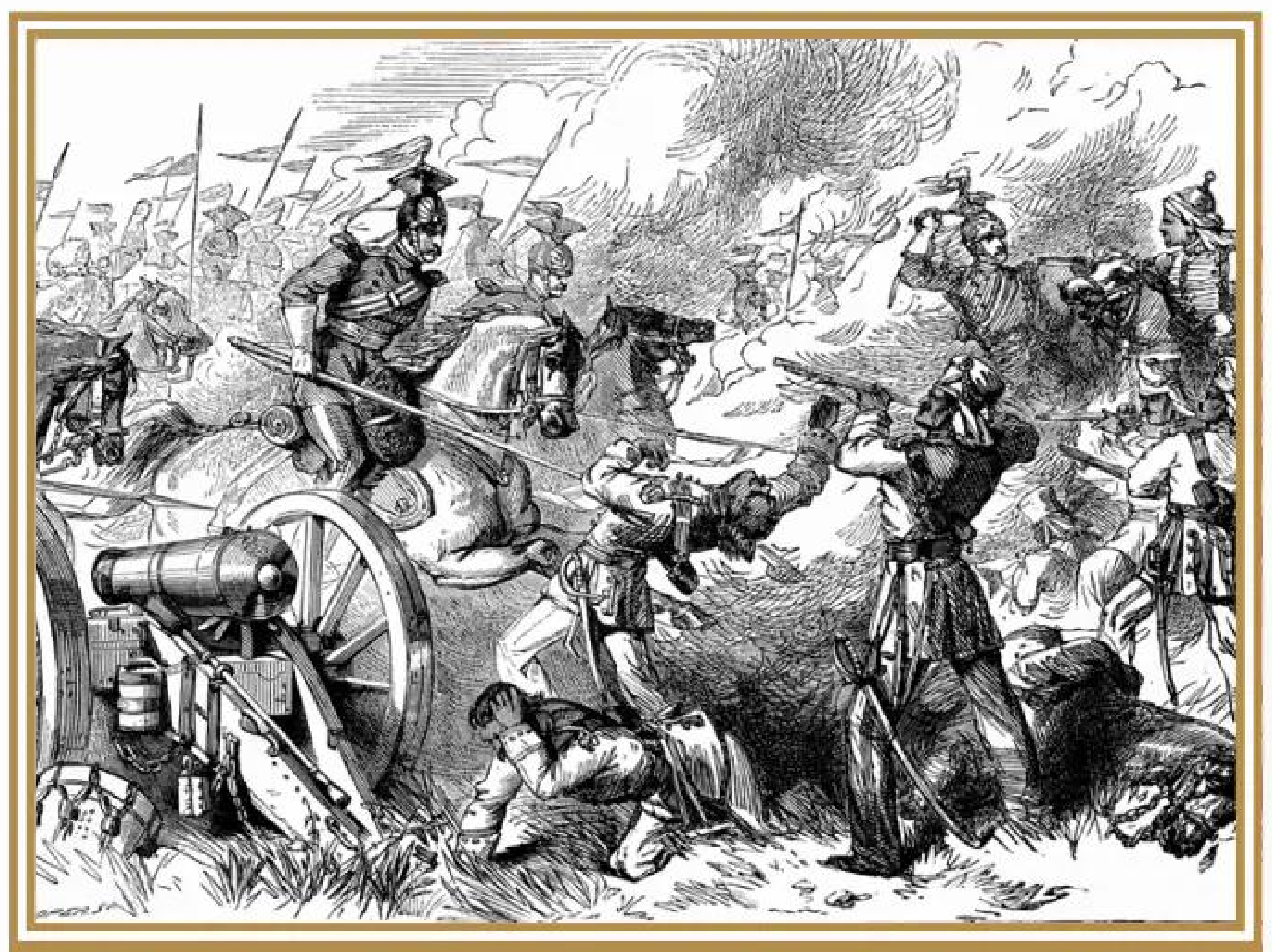
Also by 1839, two addictions would result in the first Opium War between Britain and China.

The British public's penchant for Chinese tea made demand high, however China would not trade for products made in Britain, only selling their tea (and other goods such as silk and porcelain) in exchange for silver. This love for tea saw Britain's silver reserves go down exponentially.

In order to fix what they saw as an unfair trade balance, Britain began to import opium into China from India illegally, also demanding payment in silver, which they used to pay for their tea.

Opium was used at the time as a drug to relieve pain and stress but was a highly addictive substance that caused great social and economic problems when it resulted in widespread addiction. The Chinese government had attempted to prohibit the availability of opium in order to quell this problem but the illegal imports from Britain only aggravated it. British opium traders would even offer free samples of the drug to new users in order to hook them.

Desperately trying to get a handle on the addiction crisis afflicting the country, as well as their loss in trading advantages over Britain, China destroyed all the stocks of opium being held by the British in their warehouse in Canton.

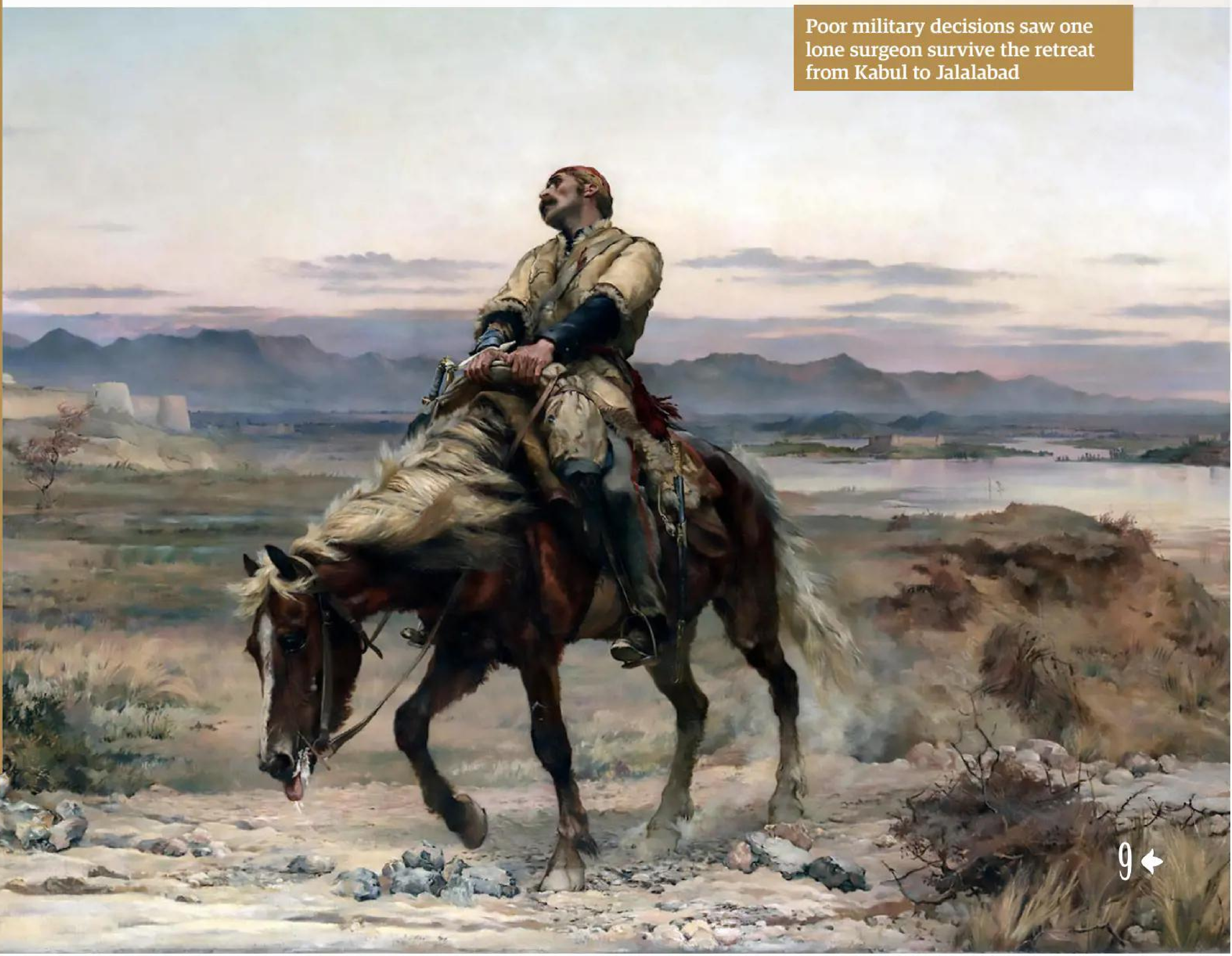


Rebels in the Indian mutiny would be fired out of their cannons once they were captured by the British

Suspicious attitudes from both countries resulted in negotiations that went nowhere, and hostilities increased after British sailors killed a Chinese villager and were protected by the British government afterwards.

War broke out in 1840 but the Chinese were unable to match the warships of Britain, which bombarded their forts and destroyed their ships before taking the city of Nanjing. In the peace negotiations that followed, Britain demanded China hand over Hong Kong, pay reparations, and allow the British to trade at further ports than the one (Canton) they had been previously able to.

Things returned to as before, albeit with heightened tensions, with Britain still smuggling in illegal opium for the addicted Chinese and buying their tea. In 1856 Chinese officials allegedly boarded a British trading ship docked in Canton, arrested two Chinese sailors, and lowered the British flag. In retaliation Britain sent a warship to attack Canton and fighting began again. Trade



Poor military decisions saw one lone surgeon survive the retreat from Kabul to Jalalabad

An Gorta Mor or The Great Hunger

How the British Empire exacerbated a crisis which saw a million starve

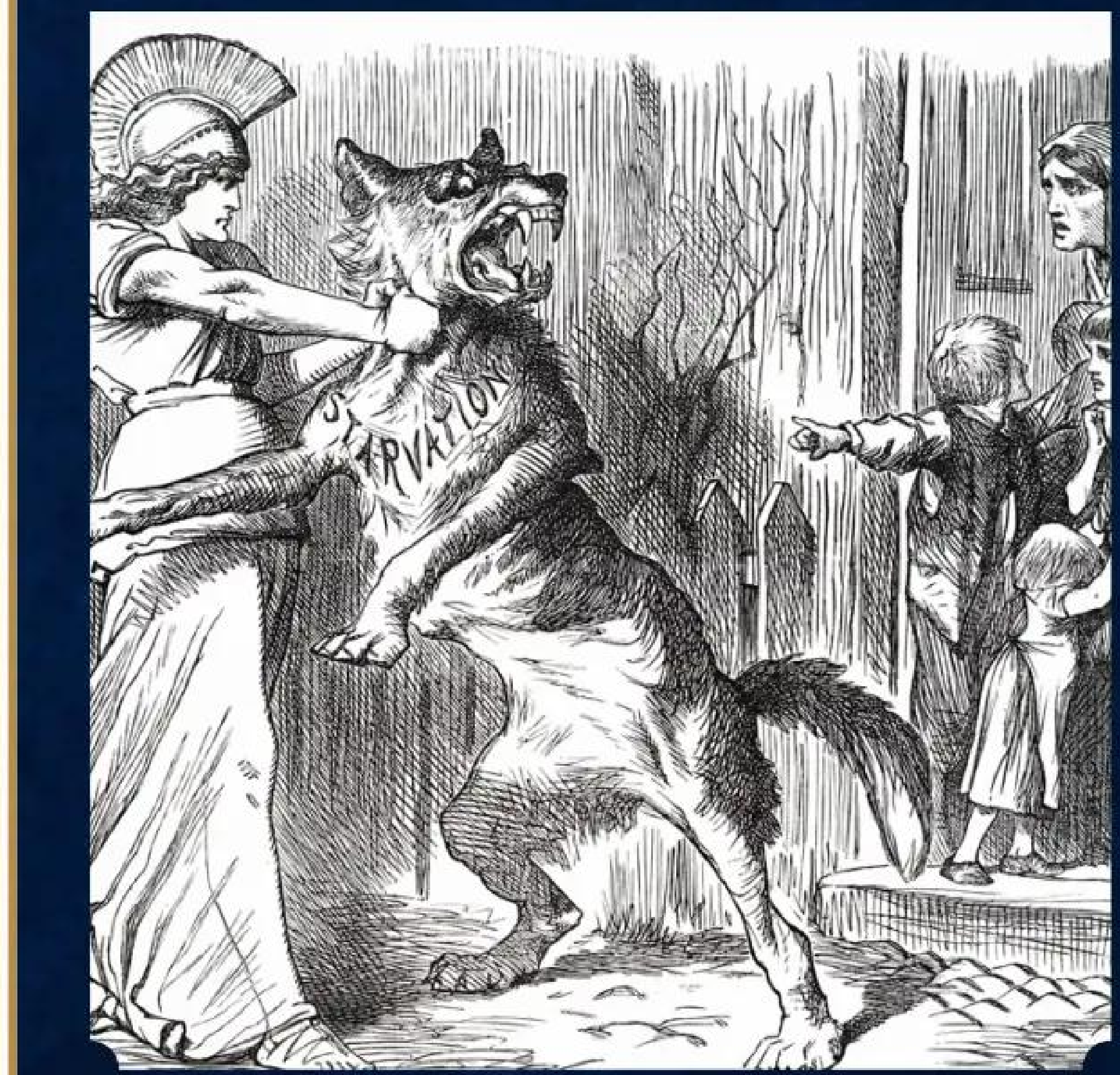
In 1845 potato crops across Europe began to fail due to a disease which caused the vegetable to rapidly decay. Whilst the effects of this were felt across the continent, it was the population of Ireland, then under the rule of the British Empire, who undoubtedly suffered the worst.

A staple crop in Ireland, for the poor the potato was depended on as a main food source as it was hardy and nutritious and easy to grow in the Irish soil. When the crops began to fail consecutively as a result of the spreading mould disease the results were devastating. It's estimated that one million Irish men, women, and children starved to death or died from illness resulting from malnutrition.

The initial response from the British was to lift tariffs on bread, but this had little effect especially as other costs were rising.

Throughout the crisis however, the British continued to allow the exporting of other foods from Ireland. Huge supplies of vegetables, livestock, dairy, fish, and even honey continued to be shipped out abroad, including to England, as usual, despite huge swathes of the population starving to death in the countryside.

By the time the famine had ended, almost another two million of the Irish population had left its shores, emigrating to North America and Great Britain, fleeing their decimated homeland.



Satire or propaganda? A cartoon shows Britannia keeping starvation from the door of Irish peasants

Concentration camps in South Africa

Horror and disease behind British barbed wire

When the Afrikaners struck gold in the land awarded to them by the British after the First Boer War, the Empire was not going to let their share go without a fight. Worries that the Afrikaners could become rich enough to be a potential threat to British colonies in South Africa also contributed towards what became the Second Boer War beginning in 1889.

After losing several battles against the Afrikaners the Empire pushed ahead with a scorched earth policy, burning Boer farms and destroying anything remotely useful. This tactic left the women and the children of the Boers with no food or shelter.

Faced with around 150,000 displaced people the British quickly built concentration camps to house them. Camps were also constructed for Black Africans who had been employed as servants for the Boer population. The food rations for the white prisoners were twice the amount and women whose husbands were still fighting in the war were also given less.

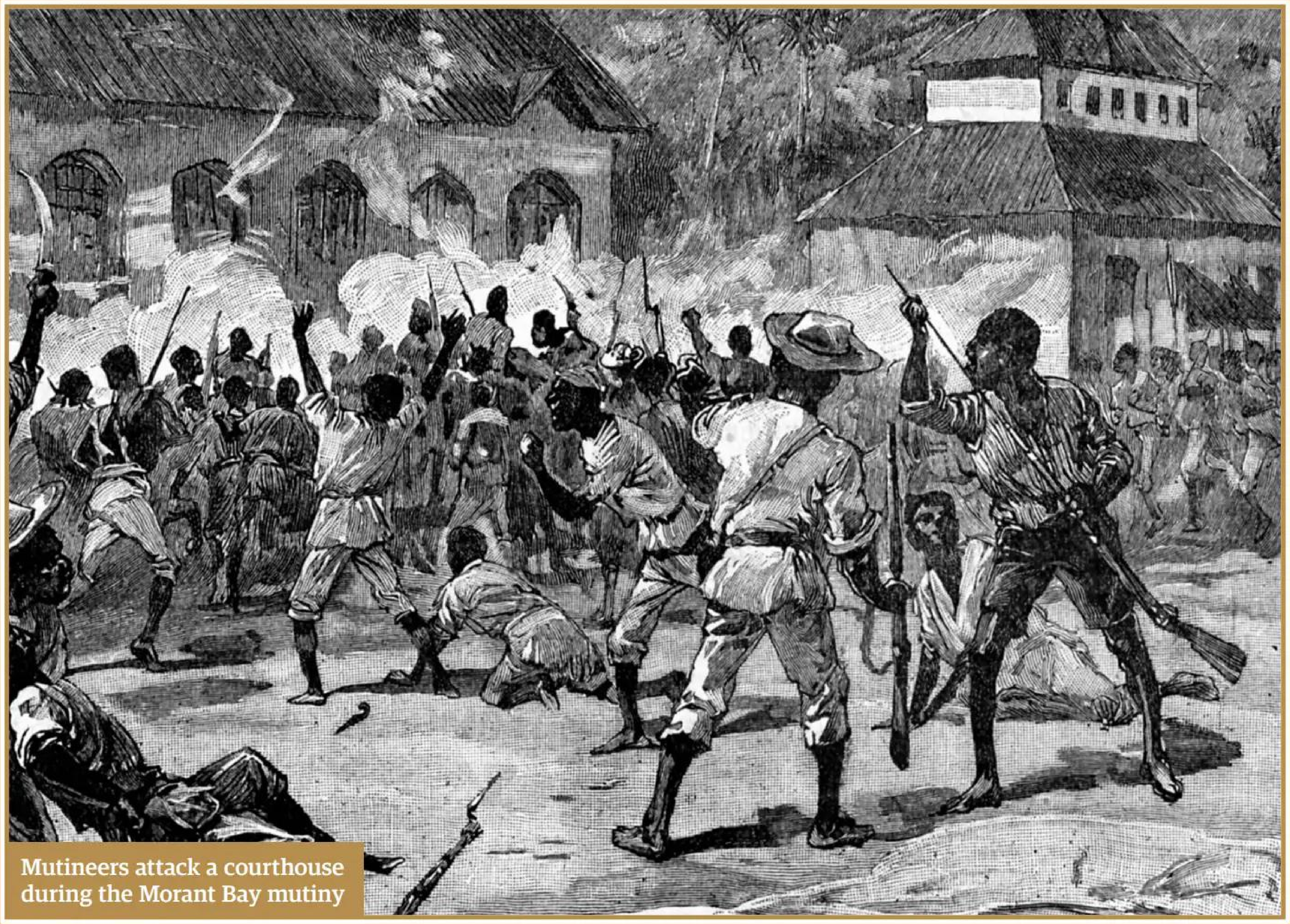
The horrific conditions of the camps included severe overcrowding (often more than 9,000 to one location), lack of nutritious food, dirty water, and diseases such as typhoid, malaria, and cholera rampaged through the detainees.

Up to 28,000 Boers are estimated to have perished in the camps, with 80 per cent said to be children. No records were kept of the native African prisoners.

The appalling treatment of the Boers shocked the public back home and it is still seen today as one of the greatest atrocities committed by the British Empire.

The majority of those who died of hunger or disease in the camps were children

© Getty; Alamy



Mutineers attack a courthouse during the Morant Bay mutiny

between the two countries stopped completely.

France, who had been waiting for a chance to avenge the death of a French missionary in China earlier that year, took this opportunity to join the war on Britain's side. Russia and the US also got involved, with all demanding improved trade relations from China.

The following year China attempted to reach a treaty with Britain, who promptly demanded legal opium imports, as well as better trade deals for themselves and their allies. Stung by the previous unfair treaty in 1842, China refused.

Instead of further negotiations, Britain promptly captured Beijing and pillaged and destroyed the Emperor's summer palace. China eventually agreed to the demands of the treaty, as well as handing over more land, and opium continued to devastate the lives of the Chinese population.

The Crimean War

The only major conflict fought by the British Empire on European soil during the Victorian era, the Crimean War was sparked in 1853 by tensions over access to holy places in the Middle East.

Fought initially between Turkey and Russia, the British Empire joined the battle along with France in 1854. Britain's reasoning for wading into the war was not out of any concern for Turkey, but that should it lose ground to Russia, the Empire's access to India could be in peril.

The battle raged longer than expected and questionable decisions made by the leaders resulted in much avoidable death. The infamous Charge of the Light Brigade caused by a miscommunication which resulted in nearly 700 men being led into an area covered by Russian guns from three sides, killing 110 men and 375 horses.

One particular battle saw a British commander order his men to "die where you stand" as they were advanced by Russians on horseback. This became known as the "thin red line".

After a failed attempt at an attack at Inkerman, where Russian troops saw 12,000 killed to the British's 2,500, and with Austria threatening to join the allied forces, Russia surrendered in 1856, signing the Treaty of Paris.

Indian rebellion

Trouble also brewed in the aforementioned crown jewel of the British Empire, when, in 1857, a rumour spread among the soldiers of the East India Company. Known as sepoys, these soldiers were predominantly native Indians of Hindu and Muslim faith, and they were horrified to hear that a new type of rifle cartridge was to be used. This cartridge was greased in pork and beef fat, and as the sepoys had to tear them open with their teeth before loading them, the presence of these animals would go against their religious beliefs. Although the British did their best to quell the rumours, resentment had been growing over the undermining of Indian culture, and eventually it erupted in mutiny which would result in bloodshed and a change in the British Empire's rule over India.

It began with a single shot when a sepoy named Mangal Pandey fired at a British officer. His fellow soldiers refused to arrest him, so they were sacked and Pandey was executed. Soon after a troop of sepoys refused to use the new rifle cartridges and were thrown in jail. Outraged, their fellow comrades broke them out and rampaged, killing British officers alongside their families, and marched onwards to Delhi. From here the mutiny spread further across the country, and city after city was captured by the rebelling soldiers.

Although slow to act, when the British finally retaliated it was with extreme vengeance. Mutineers were tortured and hung, forced to eat pork or beef and made to lick up the blood of their victims. Others were even blown to pieces by being fired from cannons.

Whilst around 6,000 British were killed in the uprising, it is thought that 800,000 Indians lost their lives in the gruesome response.

The Morant Bay mutiny

Across the Atlantic, Black Jamaicans in the West Indies, freed from slavery for the past 30 years, were becoming frustrated with the struggle for a better life. Many found themselves held hostage to low-paid work on the sugar farms of their former slave masters, and those who attempted to leave were unable to do so thanks to colonial laws, which skewed for the benefit of the wealthy landowners. Any effort to petition for better conditions was met with advice to work harder for better wages.

These simmering tensions came to a head in 1865 during the outcome of a land dispute at a courthouse in Morant Bay. The situation escalated to a clash between the uprising citizens and a militia called on hastily by the local authority, resulting in 25 people being killed and the courthouse set on fire. The governor of the colony, Edward Eyre, declared martial law, and the local Jamaican troops, joined by the British, descended on the town. The result was a massacre which saw almost 500 people slaughtered indiscriminately.

When the full details of the barbaric retribution reached Britain, many called for an inquiry into the event and for Governor Eyre to be sacked. Whilst the political landscape of the colony was changed, Eyre was ultimately not punished and instead was pensioned off.

> "Looking to create one federation in South Africa, Britain realised that it would need key territory"

The British Empire vs the Zulu

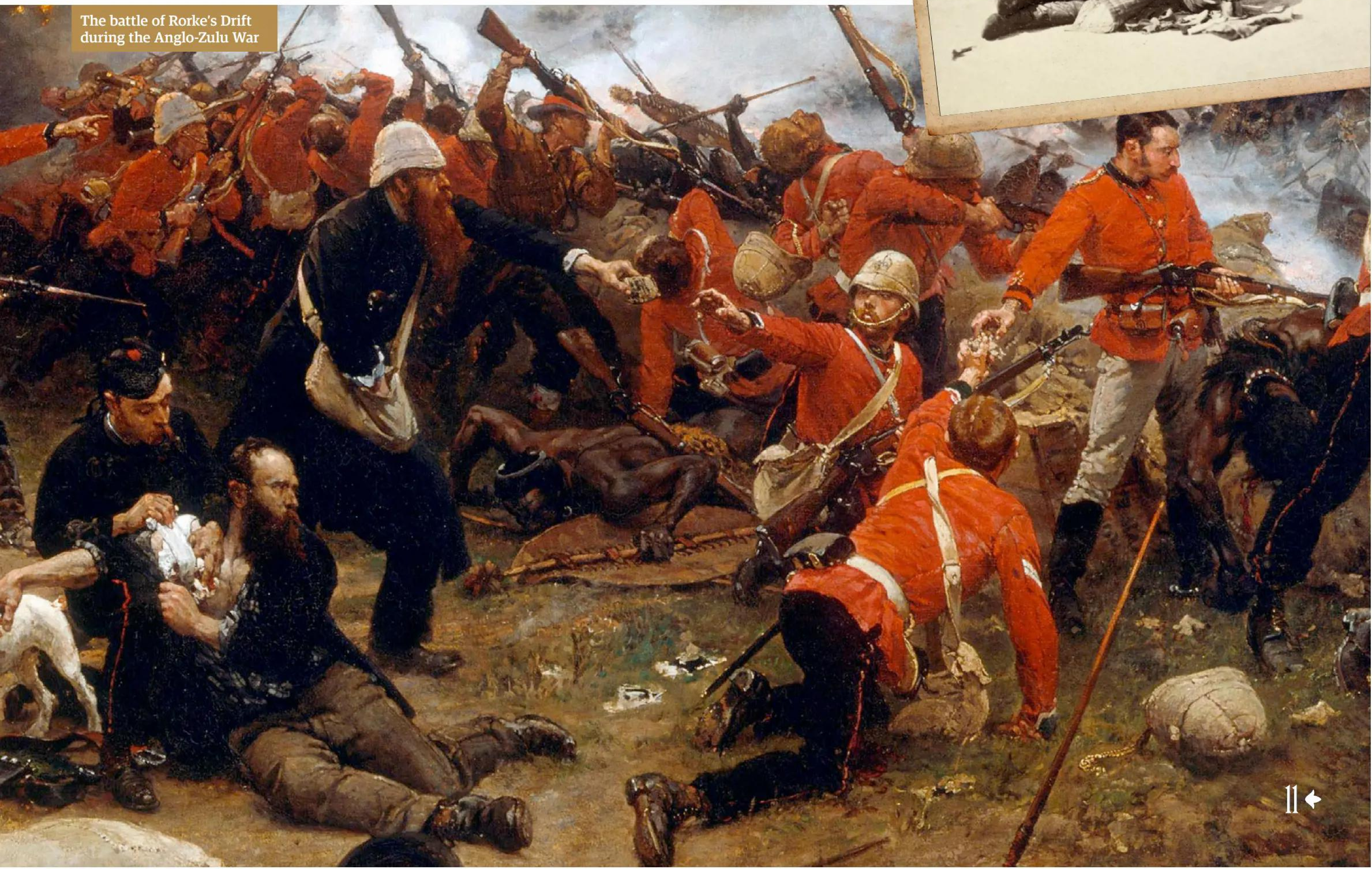
Towards the end of the 19th century, the Anglo-Zulu War erupted after Britain invaded the Zululand nation in a bloody battle to dominate the African land and its people. Looking to create one federation under the Empire in South Africa, Britain realised that it would need key territory that was held by the Zulu Kingdom. It also wanted to use the Zulu people for cheap labour in its African diamond mines.

After the Zulu king Cetshwayo rejected a British demand to disband his army, the Empire invaded to enforce it. Initially seeing the Zulus and their military as significantly inferior to the British forces, the Empire realised that it had underestimated them and suffered an embarrassing loss in a surprise ambush. The French prince Louis Napoleon, then heir to the throne of France, who had accompanied the British at Queen Victoria's behest, was also killed in a Zulu attack.

Despite initial victories the Zulu were eventually no match for the invaders' machine guns and heavy artillery. In the face of certain loss King Cetshwayo attempted to negotiate a peace deal, but shamed by an earlier defeat the British refused and pushed ahead with vengeful determination. The Zulu army was destroyed, their king captured, and their land became yet another ground for the British Empire to plant their flag. Further conquest and colonisation continued for the remaining years of the 19th century, and would eventually see the British rule over 30 per cent of Africa's population. Other European nations also had significant colonial presences on the continent.

The British Empire's power would eventually wane in the wake of two economically disastrous World Wars, and the nationalism which had bubbled under the rebellions of the Victorian era saw successful movements for independence across its colonies.

The British Empire's illegal opium imports led to widespread addiction in China


The battle of Rorke's Drift during the Anglo-Zulu War

SHAMROCK SUFFERING

During the 19th century, Ireland entered a troubled union with Great Britain and endured a terrible famine that changed the country forever

Written by Tom Garner

© Getty; Alamy

At the beginning of the 19th century, Ireland had recently emerged from a bloody revolt against the British Crown. Named after the year it occurred, the 1798 Rebellion saw Irish rebels, led by a group called the United Irishmen, attempt to overthrow the British-backed, Protestant ruling class known as 'The Ascendency'.

At that time, Ireland was unified with the British Crown but it was not part of the United Kingdom. Known as the 'Kingdom of Ireland', the island was a subordinate state to the UK, but the rebellion alarmed the British because of its size and the fact that the United Irishmen aimed to unite both Protestants and Catholics against the Ascendency.

The British brutally suppressed the rebellion, with tens of thousands being killed. The rebellion had been fought with French military support and with Britain conducting an ongoing conflict with Revolutionary France, the political status of Ireland was extremely volatile.

To reinforce their rule in Ireland, the British decided to absorb the kingdom into the rest of the UK. In 1801, Britain and Ireland were formally united in an Act of Union to become the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The Irish Parliament in Dublin was dissolved with the country being directly ruled from Westminster.

Catholic emancipation

Protestant Irish MPs were elected to the British House of Commons but the majority of Ireland's population were Roman Catholic. Since the 16th century, the Crown had imposed legal and civil limitations against Catholics across the British Isles. However, many Irish people believed that they'd be compensated with Catholic 'emancipation' from discrimination after the Act of Union.

The British prime minister, William Pitt the Younger, had promised Irish Catholic Emancipation after the Union but he was strongly opposed by King George III. The king believed he would be violating his coronation oath to protect the Church of England by granting additional liberties. Pitt resigned and Catholic Emancipation dominated Ireland's first decades of British rule.

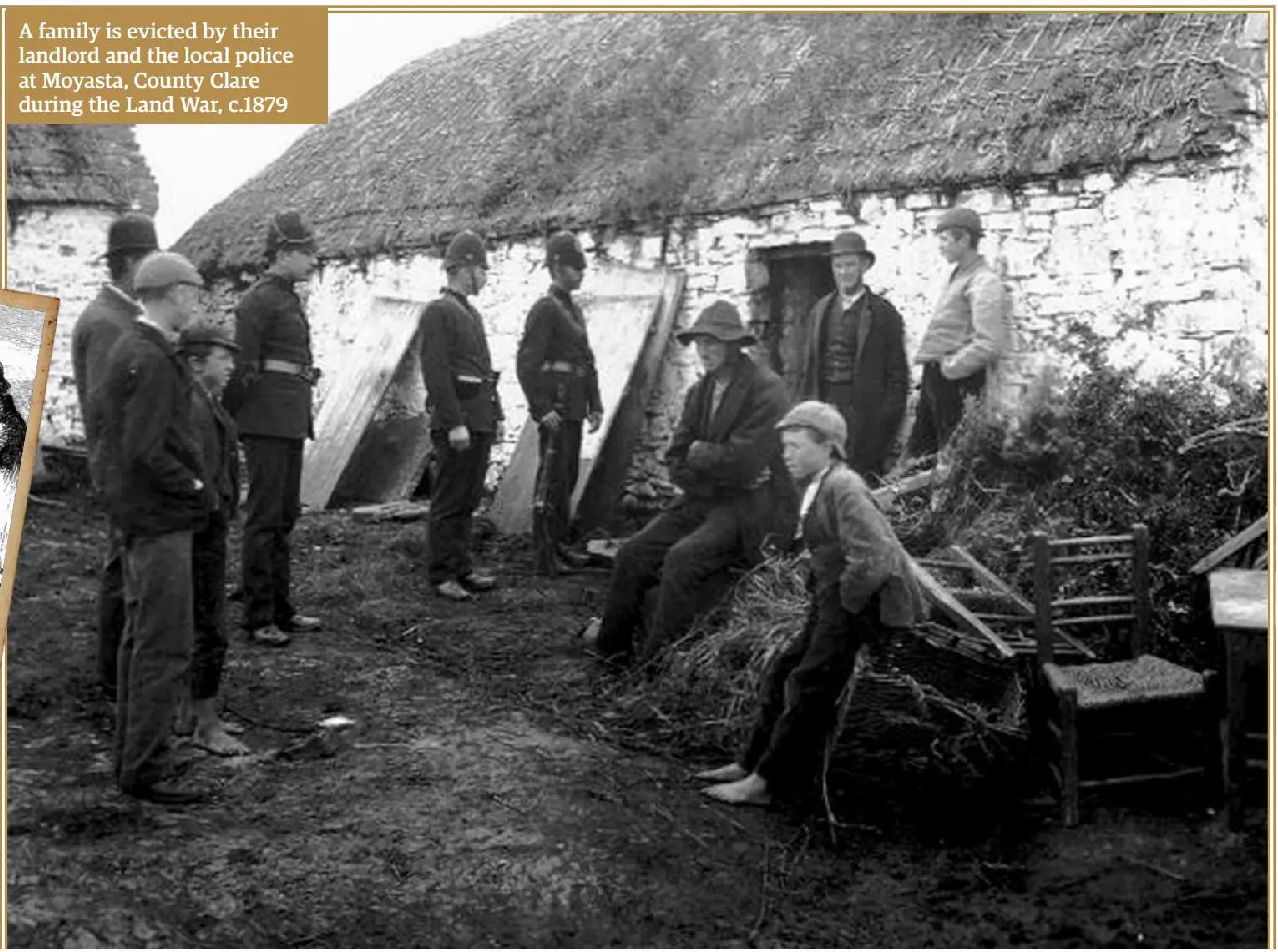
In the 1820s, the Catholic Association was established by Daniel O'Connell to campaign for emancipation. A mass movement, the Association was skillfully led by O'Connell, who was a charismatic politician. In 1828, he was elected to Parliament as the MP for Clare but he was unable to take his seat in the House of Commons due to the anti-Catholic wording of the parliamentary oath.

O'Connell's election forced the British to concede to emancipation with the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1829. Catholics were no longer barred from Parliament or from other high judicial or state offices, with O'Connell finally taking his seat in 1830. He would remain an MP for the next 17 years and became known as 'The Liberator' by his fellow Irish Catholics.

The Great Famine

Catholic Emancipation was hard won after centuries of discrimination, but the Irish remained one of the poorest peoples in Europe. The Protestant Ascendency still held sway as Ireland's principal landowners, despite 80 per cent of the Irish population being Catholic. Most Irish people lived in poverty under a harsh tenant system, but during the early 19th century the population grew substantially to approximately eight million people.

This was largely due to the Irish consuming potatoes, a nutritious crop that could produce


A family is evicted by their landlord and the local police at Moyasta, County Clare during the Land War, c.1879

The Irish diaspora

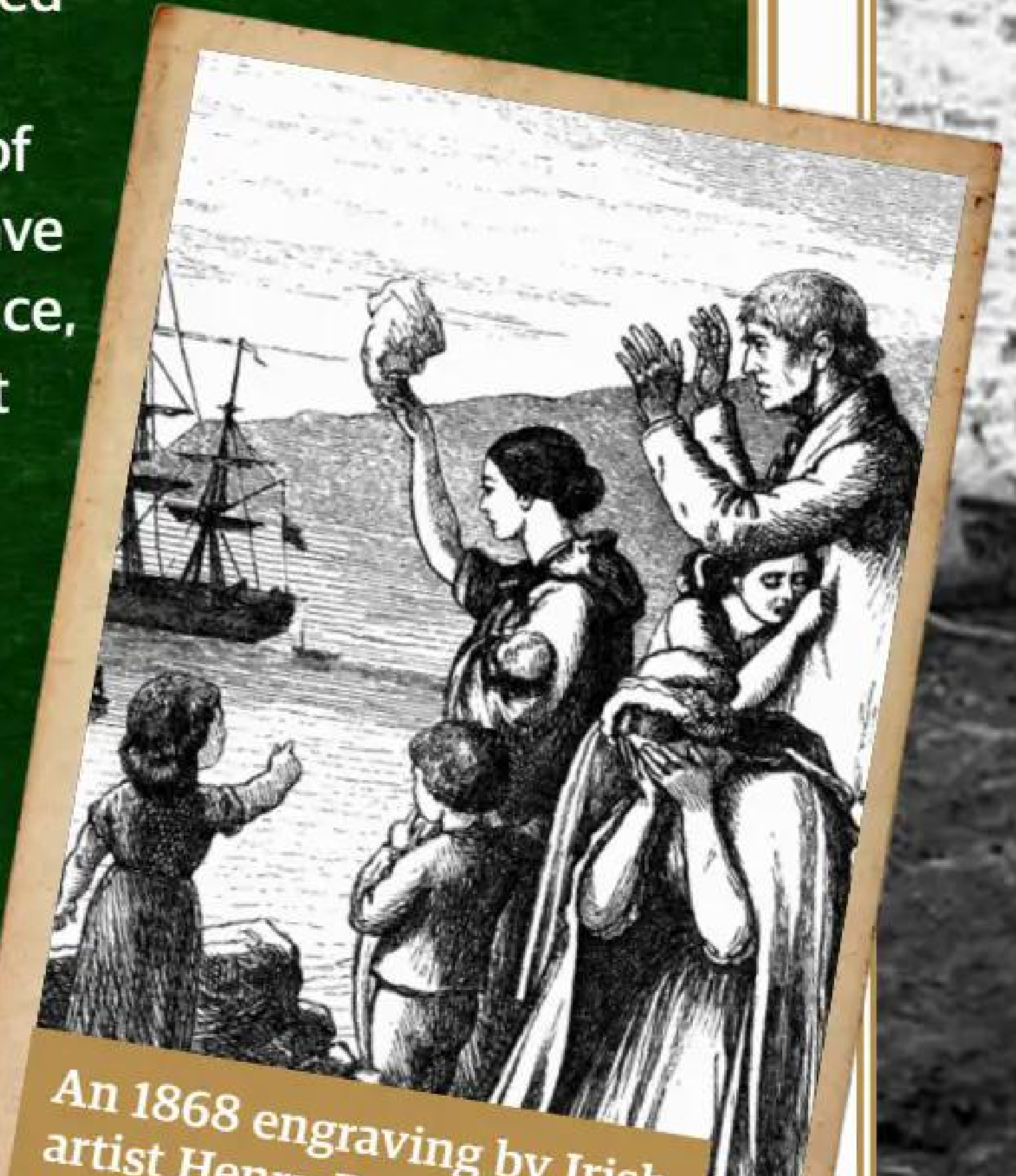
The 19th century saw Irish people emigrate across the world in vast numbers

Migration from Ireland had been occurring for hundreds of years before the 19th century but it was during the 1800s that Irish emigration became a huge part of the island's social history. Even before the Great Famine, it is estimated that approximately one million Irish people emigrated to Canada and the United States between 1815-46.

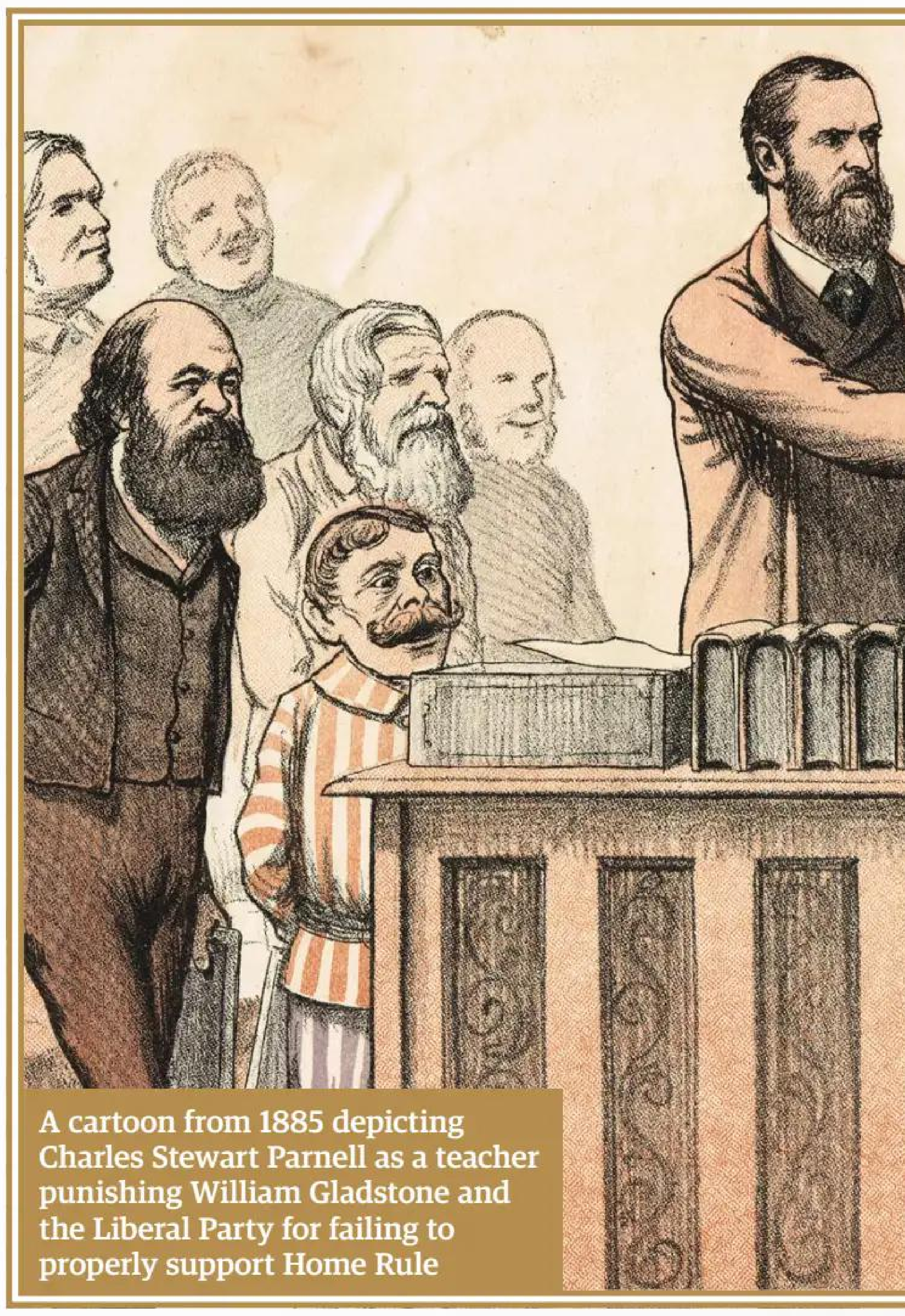
Nevertheless, the famine greatly increased emigration in a far shorter period of time, with over one million people leaving Ireland during 1846-51. The majority left for North America while around 200,000 emigrated to Britain. Those who settled in Britain tended to be the poorest in Irish society because emigration across the Atlantic, and particularly to the United States, was considered the most desirable destination and therefore the most expensive.

Even for those who could afford passage to North America, voyages were fraught with risk. Ships were often overcrowded with passengers travelling in cramped conditions and poor sanitation. Thousands of malnourished, ill Irish passengers died of disease en route, with the vessels becoming later known as "coffin ships".

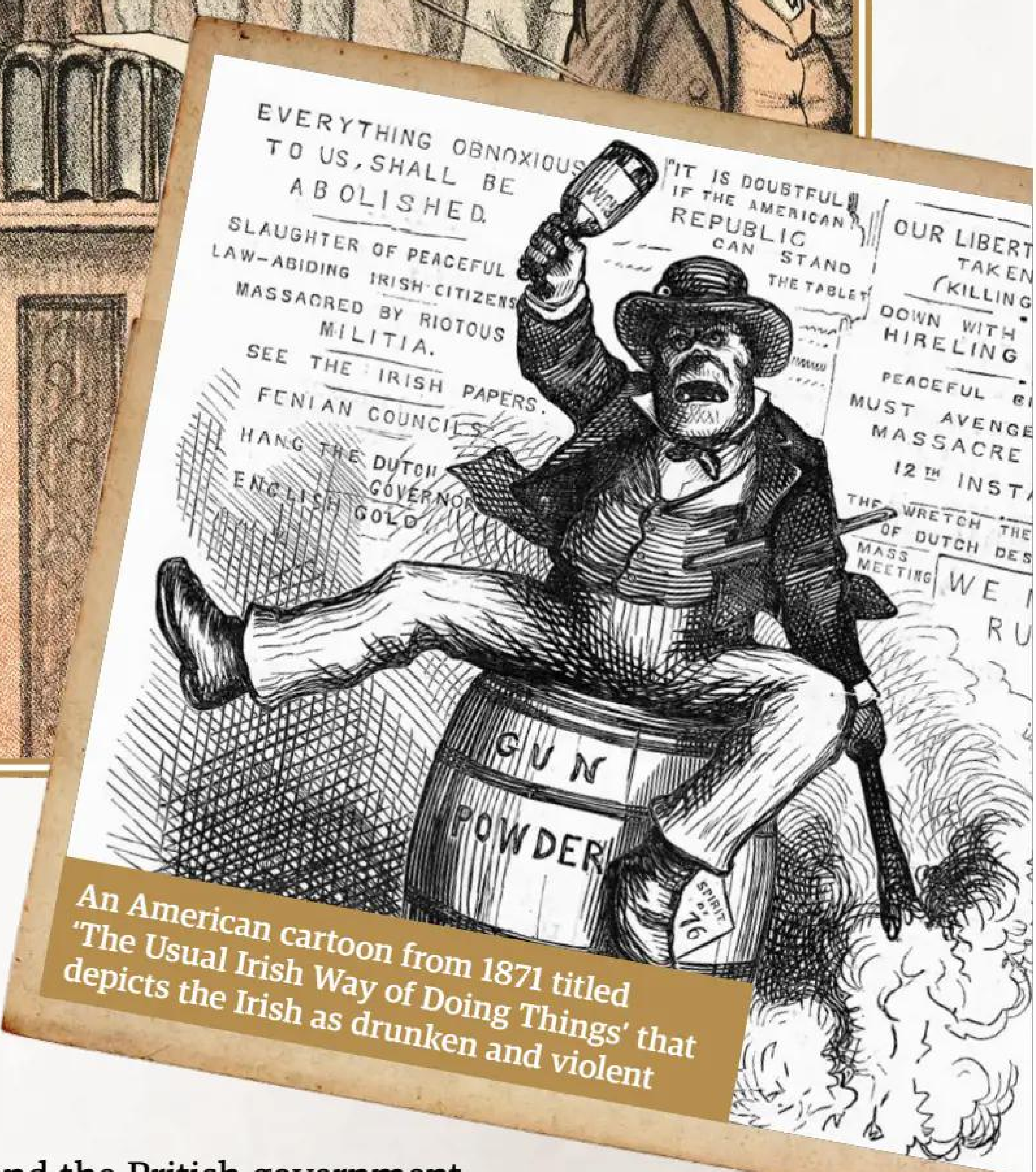
High levels of emigration continued after the famine and by the end of the 19th century, more Irish people who were born in Ireland lived outside it than in it. This transformed the demographics of cities across the world, from London, Liverpool and Glasgow in Britain to New York and Boston in the United States. Thanks to persistent waves of emigration that have continued ever since, it is estimated that 9.5 per cent of all Americans have Irish ancestry while around 10 per cent of people living in the UK today have at least one Irish grandparent.


An 1868 engraving by Irish artist Henry Doyle called *The Emigrant's Farewell*

© Getty; Alamy



A cartoon from 1885 depicting Charles Stewart Parnell as a teacher punishing William Gladstone and the Liberal Party for failing to properly support Home Rule


EVERYTHING OBNOXIOUS TO US, SHALL BE ABOLISHED
IT IS DOUBTFUL IF THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC CAN STAND THE TABLE
OUR LIBERT TAKEN KILLING DOWN WITH HIRELING
SLAUGHTER OF PEACEFUL LAW-ABIDING IRISH CITIZENS MASSACRED BY RIOTOUS MILITIA.
SEE THE IRISH PAPERS.
FENIAN COUNCILS
HANG THE DUTCH GOVERNOR
ENGLISH GOLD
PEACEFUL MUST AVENGE MASSACRE 12TH INST
MASS MEETING
GUN POWDER

An American cartoon from 1871 titled 'The Usual Irish Way of Doing Things' that depicts the Irish as drunken and violent

high yields in small plots of land. By the 1840s, the potato was the staple food for a third of the Irish population and was also extensively fed to livestock as well as families.

However, in 1845, Western Europe was struck by a fungus blight known as Phytophthora infestans that devastated the potato crop. Potatoes became inedible, but while other European countries (including England) could cope with the blight, the Irish began to suffer disproportionately due to their dependency on the crop.

For the next seven years, the potato crop continually failed, with Ireland enduring the worst European famine of the century. Despite Britain being the richest and most powerful country in the world at the time, the British government's response to the famine was disastrous.

With the Irish population starving en masse, the Conservative prime minister, Sir Robert Peel, made initial attempts to relieve the suffering. Maize was imported and government funds, schemes and food distribution were implemented with some success. Peel also attempted to repeal grain tariffs (known as the Corn Laws), but this policy split the Conservative Party and he was forced to resign in 1846. His successor, the Whig leader Lord John Russell, then led an administration that increased the calamity.

During the 1840s, British politicians largely believed in a laissez-faire approach to economics that focused on minimal government interventions. In relation to the famine, this meant that Parliament passed legislation that required private Irish landowners to lead the relief effort. However, this meant that many Ascendency landlords removed their starving tenants to save money rather than feed them.

In 1846, the government leader of the relief effort, Charles Trevelyan, closed Ireland's food depots. A senior Treasury official and a firm believer in laissez-faire, Trevelyan was concerned that the Irish would become too dependent on government aid, which would then negatively affect private enterprises. Trevelyan planned that the Irish would be fed through free markets, but poor private merchant practices and the continual failure of the potato crop simply resulted in more starvation.

The government was forced to reverse its non-intervention policy in 1847 but the damage was done. Belated relief initiatives, such as soup kitchens and public works programmes, achieved little, with the year 1847 in particular becoming known as 'Black '47' in Ireland.

The failed potato harvests and government responses led to a grim combination of starvation, disease and destitution across Ireland. It is estimated that the famine resulted in the deaths of approximately one million people, while a further million emigrated to North America, Britain and Australia. This loss of over two million people during 1845-52 represented one-quarter of Ireland's total population. Over 150 years later, the Irish domestic population has still not recovered to its pre-famine level.

The British government's famine policies were widely criticised across the political spectrum. John Mitchel, an Irish nationalist journalist, said, "The Almighty, indeed, sent the potato blight, but the English created the famine."

Even British officials in Ireland believed that the government was deliberately mismanaging its relief efforts. In April 1849, the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland wrote to Prime Minister Russell, "I don't think there is another legislature in Europe that would disregard such suffering as now exists in the west of Ireland, or coldly persist in a policy of extermination."

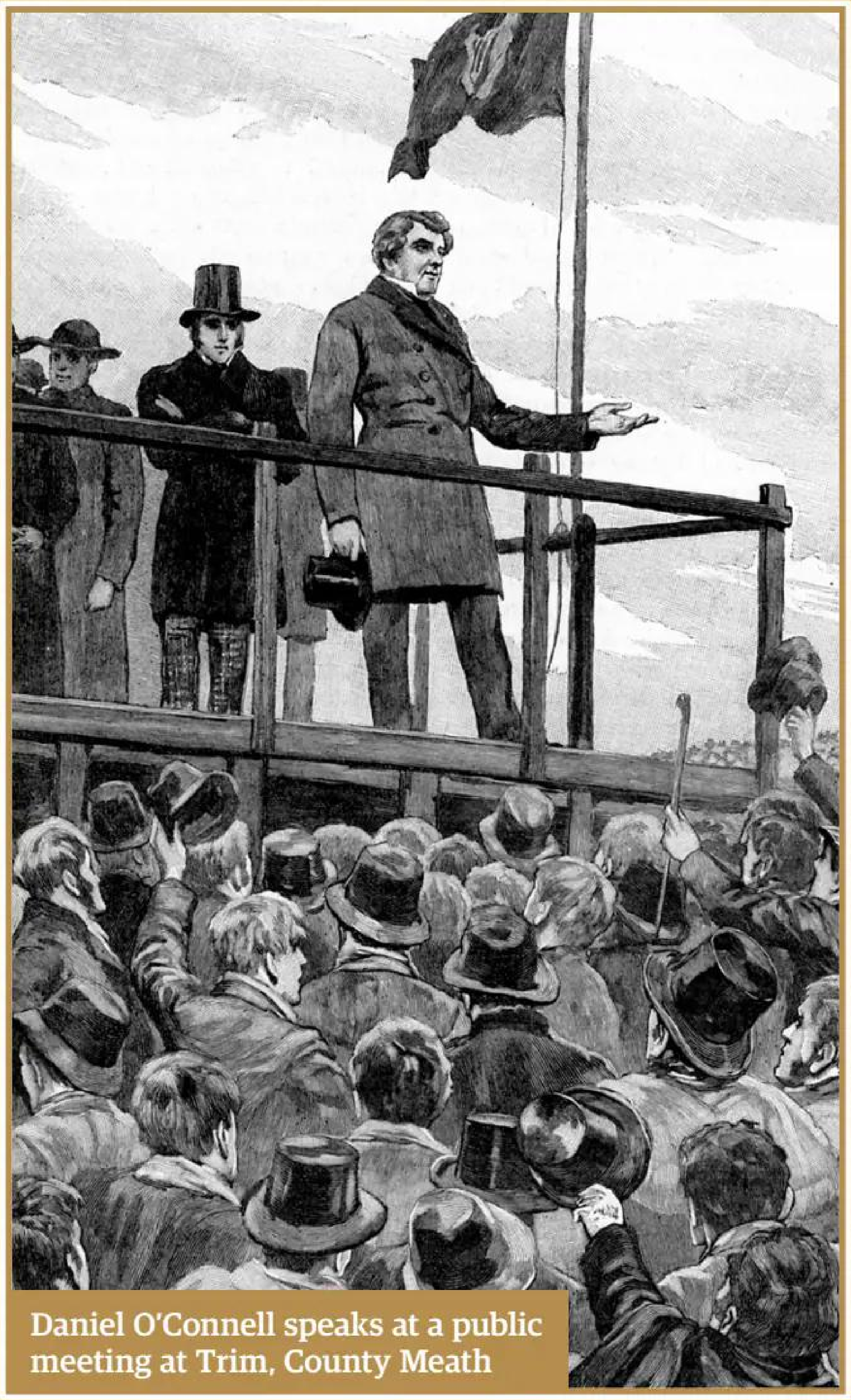
This accusation of what would now be called genocide has continued to haunt British-Irish relations. This is sometimes rooted in Charles Trevelyan's controversial quote, "[The famine] is a punishment from God for an idle, ungrateful, and rebellious country; an indolent and un-self-reliant people. The Irish are suffering from an affliction of God's providence."

Anti-Irish sentiment

There is continual debate as to whether Trevelyan and the British government were deliberately advocating genocide during the famine, but it is true that anti-Irish sentiment was widespread during the 19th century. Irish Catholics were held in deep suspicion by the Protestant-led governments of Britain, the wider British Empire and the United States. This institutional prejudice was reflected by public persecution and discrimination by the countries the Irish emigrated to. Often depicted as drunken and violent, the Irish were routinely barred from employment in places where there were large immigrant populations, such as Liverpool and New York. During the 1850s, Protestant American 'Nativists' launched the 'Know Nothing' Movement to remove Irish Catholics from public office.

There was similar hostility in Britain. Even before the famine, Benjamin Disraeli, a future prime minister, spoke for many English people when he wrote of the Irish in 1836, "This wild, reckless, indolent, uncertain and superstitious race have no sympathy with the English character." Such was the discrimination that British advertisements often read, "Help wanted – no Irish need apply". This slogan was widespread on both sides of the Atlantic and even became the subject of a popular protest song in 1862. Variations on the phrase remained common well into the 20th century.

"Over 150 years later, the Irish domestic population has still not recovered to its pre-famine level"



Daniel O'Connell speaks at a public meeting at Trim, County Meath

Land War

During the 1870s-90s and particularly during 1879-82, Ireland was consumed by a period of rural civil unrest known as the 'Land War'. Already gravely weakened by the Great Famine, the west of Ireland was hit by another famine in 1879. Thanks to a new railway system and an improved response from the British government, the famine resulted in far fewer deaths. However, it was a factor in tenant farmers being unable to pay their rent, which resulted in clashes with landowners.

Evictions of poor tenant labourers had long been a political issue in Ireland but the 1870s saw increasing demands for land reform. The Irish National Land League was formed in 1879 with the aim of abolishing landlordism and enabling tenants to own the land they worked on. Its president was Charles Stewart Parnell, a Protestant nationalist who became the most influential politician in the House of Commons.

The Land League held mass meetings and resisted eviction attempts using non-violent methods. Those who attempted to enforce eviction, such as landlords and the police, were 'boycotted' (publicly shunned) as well as tenants who wanted to pay rent. These tactics resulted in the government passing various Land Acts during the late 19th century that gradually extended property rights, including the ability of tenants to purchase land from landlords.

Home Rule

Around the same time as the Land War, there were increasing calls for Ireland to have 'Home Rule'. An early form of devolution, Home Rule was defined as Irish self-government within the United Kingdom.

Daniel O'Connell was an early proponent of self-government with his failed campaign to repeal the Act of Union in the 1830s. During the 1870s, the Home Rule League was formed, which won 63 parliamentary seats in the 1880 general election. The League's chairman was Charles Stewart Parnell, who was also making political waves during the Land War.

Parnell transformed the League into the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) in 1882 and turned it into a major political force. In the 1885 general election, the IPP won 85 out of 103 Irish seats and even gained an MP in Liverpool. Such was their success that William Gladstone, the Liberal British prime minister, became impressed by Parnell and personally committed to granting Irish Home Rule from 1885.

Gladstone made two attempts to pass Home Rule but he was defeated in Parliament on each

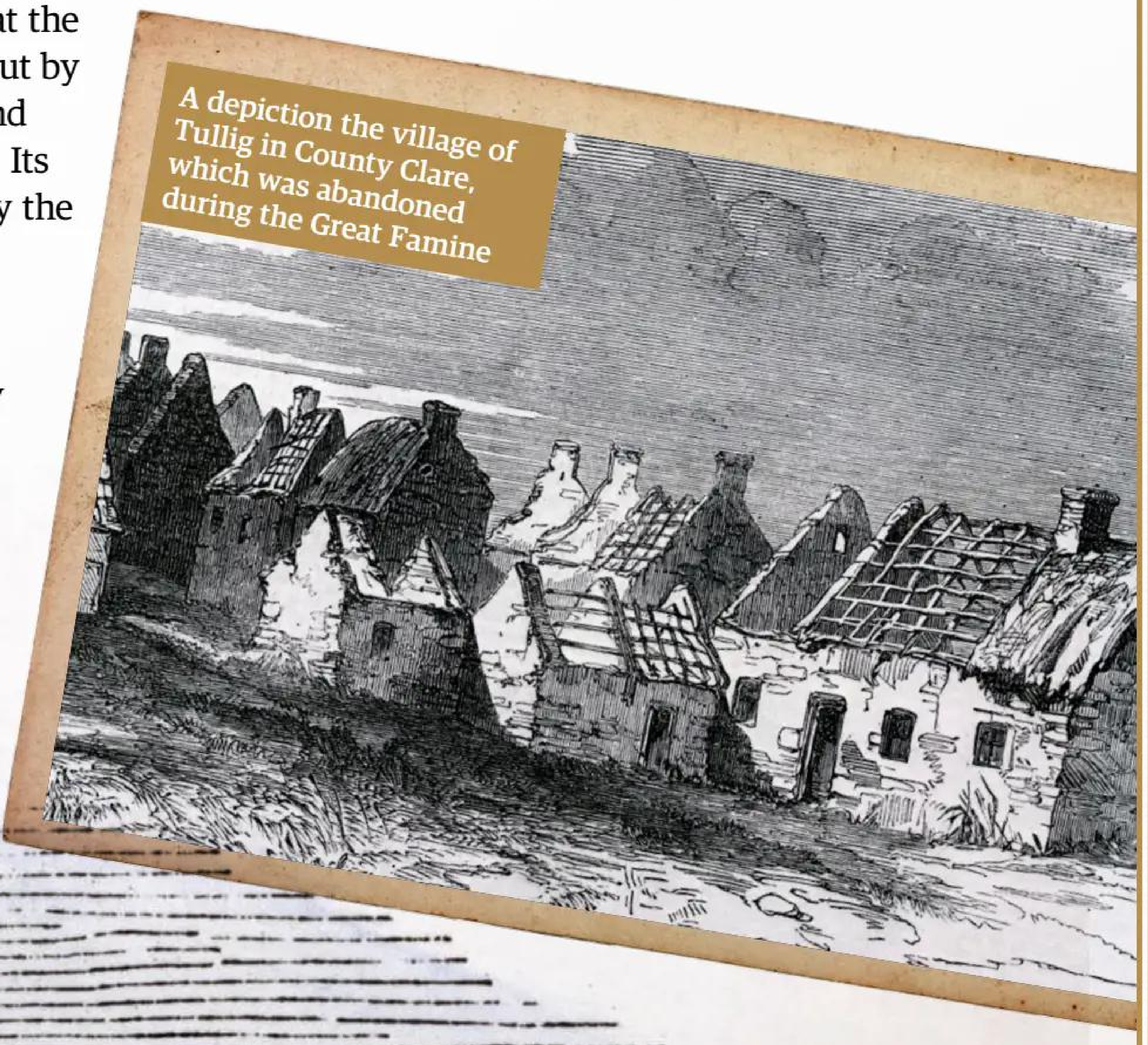
> "The people of the British Isles still live with the consequences of Ireland's 19th century experience and its tragic fallout remains politically unresolved"

occasion and even forced to resign on the issue in 1886. Home Rule was a highly contentious issue during the late 19th century and vehemently opposed, both in Britain and in Ireland, by Protestants who feared that self-government threatened their privileged position. Ultimately, the Home Rule issue floundered. In 1890, Parnell was disgraced when he was discovered to have been conducting an extramarital affair. His behaviour split the IPP and led to many British Liberals withdrawing their support because of their own religious views on marriage.

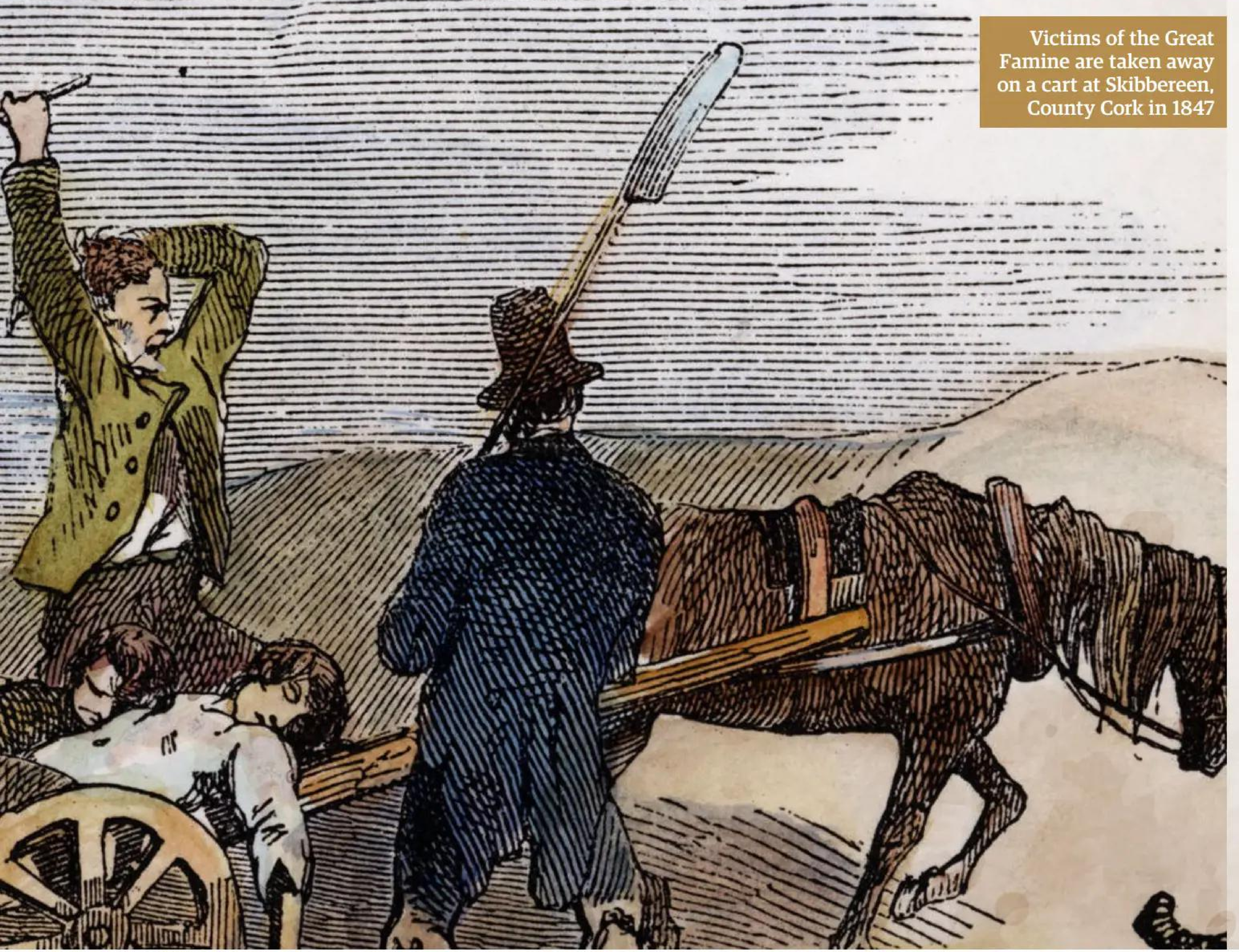
Parnell died the following year and his death weakened the Home Rule movement for the rest of the century. Gladstone's Second Home Rule Bill did pass through the House of Commons in 1893 but it was then defeated in the House of Lords. It would not be until 1914 that the Third Home Rule Bill was passed, but by then civil war was brewing in Ireland between nationalists and Unionists. Its implementation was also delayed by the outbreak of the First World War.

The failure to secure Home Rule in the 19th century eventually led to conflict in the early 20th century with the 1916 Easter Rising, War of Independence (1919–21) and the Irish Civil War (1922–23). These events resulted in the partition of Ireland in 1921 into the Irish Free State (a self-governing Dominion within the British Empire) and Northern Ireland, which remained in the UK. If Gladstone, Parnell and others had been able to pass Home Rule, Ireland's violent 20th-century history could have been avoided.

Ireland's story during the 19th century was ultimately a tragedy. It was marked by political agitation and dominated by the catastrophe of the Great Famine. This horrific event caused a huge loss of life, permanently changed the demographics and politics of Ireland and greatly damaged British-Irish relations. The people of the British Isles still live with the consequences of Ireland's 19th century experience and its tragic fallout remains politically unresolved.



A depiction the village of Tullig in County Clare, which was abandoned during the Great Famine



Victims of the Great Famine are taken away on a cart at Skibbereen, County Cork in 1847

Fenians

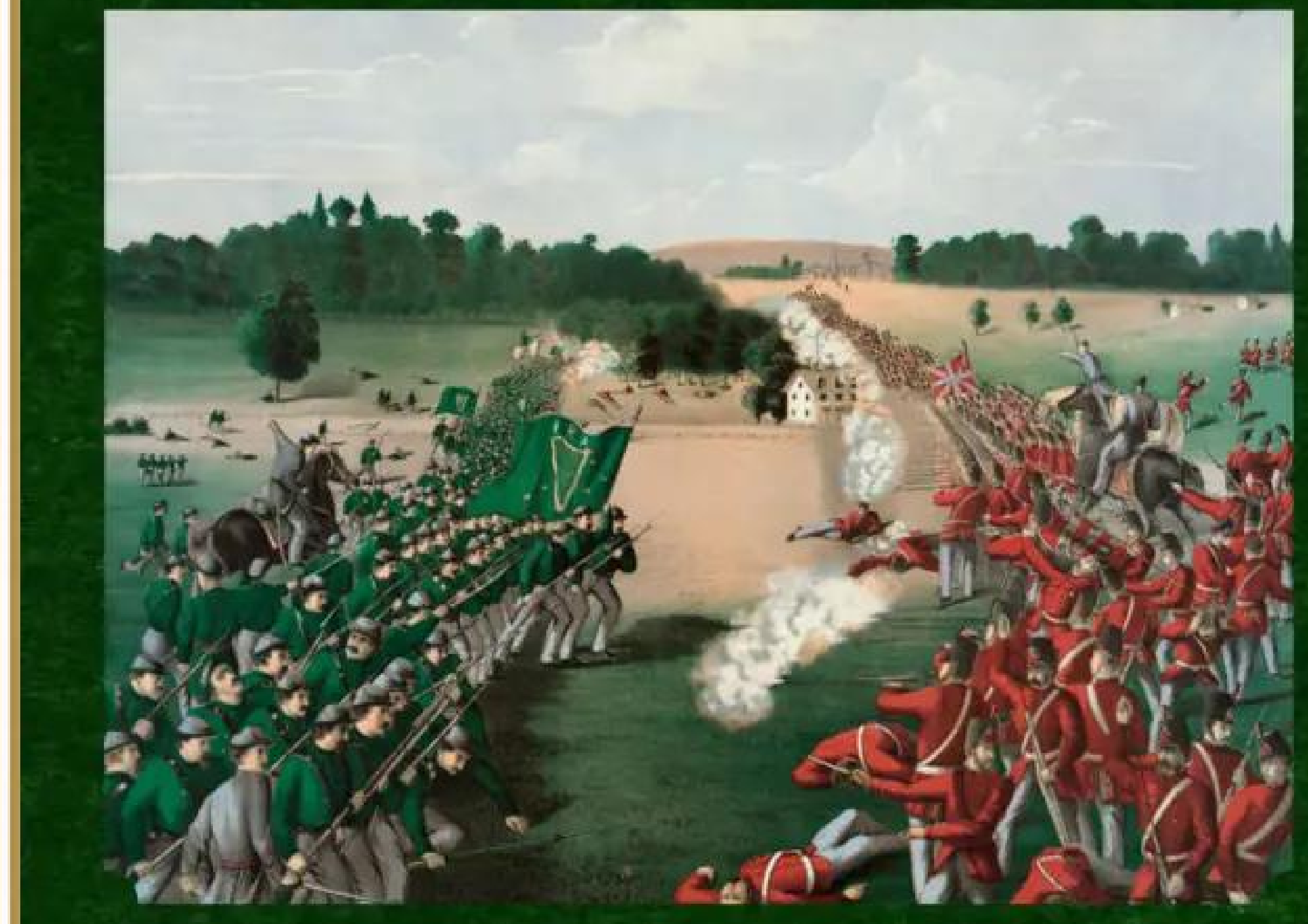
Militant Irish republicans fought against the British in Ireland, England and North America in the mid to late 19th century

In the aftermath of the Great Famine, Irish republicans began to form secret militant organisations that aimed to overthrow British rule. These groups were collectively known as 'Fenians' and took their name from the Gaelic Fianna - bands of legendary warriors from Irish mythology.

From 1858, the Fenians were represented in Ireland by the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB). Meanwhile, the IRB's sister organisation in the United States was the Fenian Brotherhood.

During the late 19th century, Fenians on both sides of the Atlantic committed acts of violence against the British. During 1866-71, the Fenian Brotherhood attacked British military fortifications in Canada from the United States in what became known as the Fenian Raids. The largest engagement of these raids occurred at Ridgeway, Ontario in June 1866, where hundreds of Fenians defeated Canadian militiamen in a pitched battle. Nevertheless, the British were eventually able to stop the Fenian raids.

In 1867, there were failed risings across Ireland while there was Fenian violence in Manchester and London. The most notable event was when Fenians exploded a bomb at Clerkenwell Prison on 13 December 1867, which killed 12 people and injured hundreds more. The Fenians later attacked the London Underground during the 1880s, but their violent efforts proved unsuccessful. Instead, the IRB became the parent organisation of the Irish Volunteers, and later the Irish Republican Army, that staged the Easter Rising in 1916 and the Irish War of Independence from 1919–1921.



A stylised depiction of the Battle of Ridgeway from 1869 that inaccurately depicts the Fenians wearing matching green uniforms

© Getty; Alamy

Pride, prejudice and persecution

What did the Victorians really think about race, sex and religion?

Written by Christopher Evans

© Getty

Many of us look back on the Victorian era as being a society of strict moral values. We have heard of raunchy tales of ankle flashing that shocked polite society, sending shock waves through the upper classes and had them racing for the smelling salts. Meanwhile, prostitution was the highest paid job for women and there were 80,000 sex workers just in London alone.

This hypocrisy in the Victorians' attitude to sex only scratches the surface of their more dubiously held values. While the enormous divide between the upper and lower classes often had an impact on the individual's moral code, here we take a look at some of the views held by Victorians on topics which transcended wealth, money and social standing.

'Savages' and scientific racism

During the Victorian era the British Empire was at its most powerful. Britain had colonies all across the world which it had wrestled from their indigenous peoples, who were seen as inferior to the Anglo-Saxon. During the many wars the Empire waged against populations of these distant lands, imperialistic views were fed to the public in Britain via newspapers who would often refer to them as 'savages'. Any defeat of the British military during these battles would be received with shock and anger. The public would often support punishment and retribution against mutinies and rebellions in the colonies, believing the 'natives' needed to be ruled hard.

Closer to home, the Victorian era saw the rise of scientific racism. Pseudoscientific research, such as craniometry, which was the measuring and study of human skulls, was used to promote the idea that White people and Black people had biological differences. This would then be presented as evidence of racial superiority.

After Charles Darwin published his influential book *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, his theories were co-opted and became the basis for the concept of 'Social Darwinism'. This was the view that coined the phrase 'survival of the fittest', promoting the idea that certain inequalities stemmed from nature. This fed into the racist views that certain races (ie, White people) were more 'evolved' or adapted for success than others.

Due to the great outreach of her British Empire, Queen Victoria would form relationships with people from all over the world. While many of these interactions were ceremonial, she would go on to 'adopt' people of colour as informal 'godchildren'. These included Sara Forbes Bonetta, a girl from Africa who was given to a British naval captain as a 'gift', and Princess Gouramma of Coorg, an exile from India. Although from diverse backgrounds and showered with fine belongings and a good education, these wards would be converted to Christianity and expected to represent the royal family. While they lived with other families, their behaviour and lives were controlled closely by the Queen. Gouramma, for instance, was forbidden from seeing her father and speaking in her native language.

Beyond the veil

Although Britain's religious diversity was growing thanks to its links to other countries via the Empire and immigration, the main religion practised in Victorian society was Christianity.

Around half of the population worshipped at church on Sundays, but everybody was forced to pay a tithe – a payment of ten per cent of annual income which went to the local parish or vicar.

While the Church did continue to care for its communities with charitable forces looking after the poor, it often did so with an underlying agenda. Sunday schools that were created to take in poor children and teach them to read and write would only use the Bible.

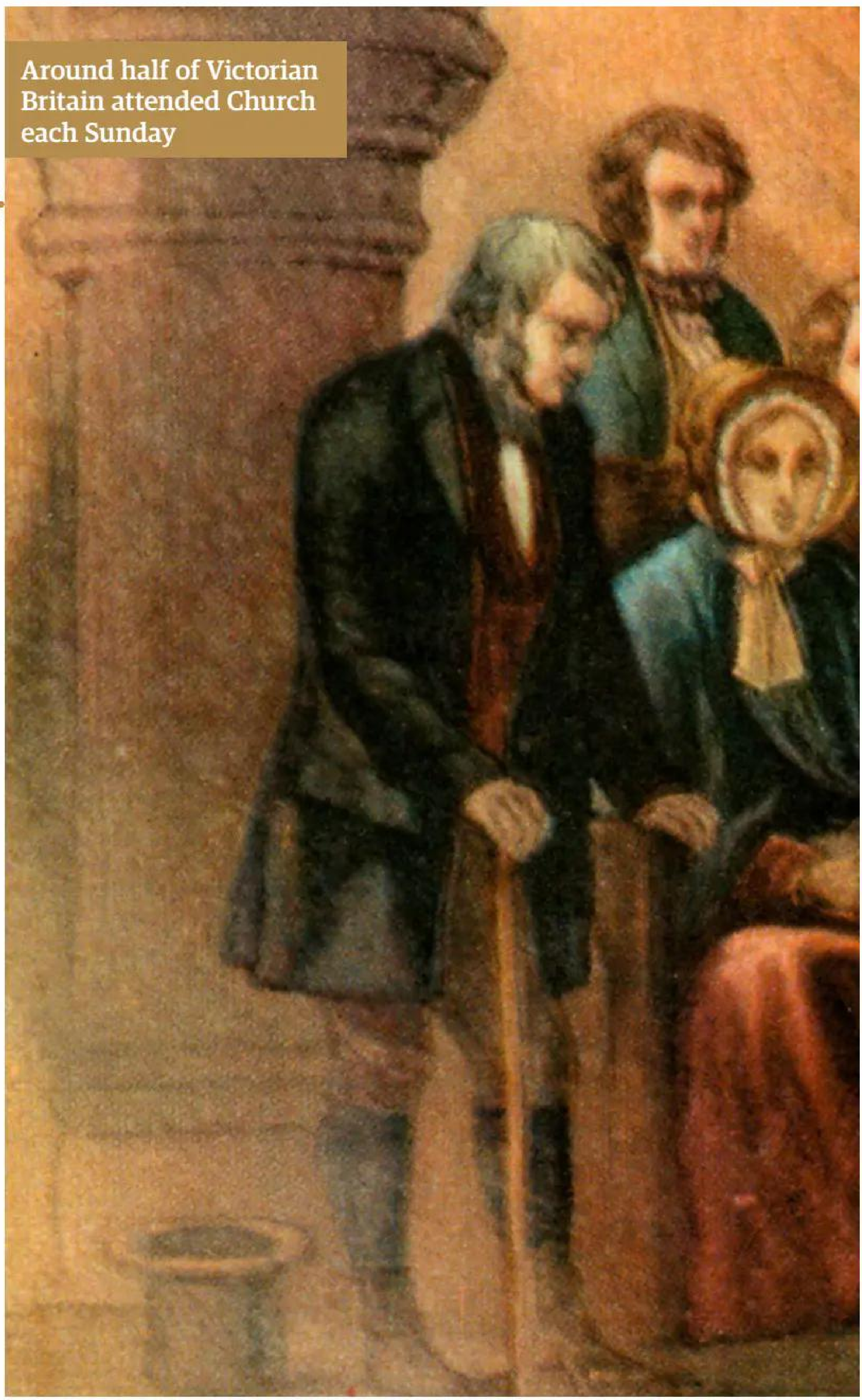
© Getty; Alamy

Sara Forbes Bonetta, one of Queen Victoria's 'godchildren'

"While the Church did continue to care for its communities, it often did so with an underlying agenda"

However, there was a growing doubt among the people of Britain during the Victorian era, and the traditional views towards Christianity were beginning to erode. Some of this came down to new scientific discoveries, which were at odds with the teachings of the Bible. For example, theories on evolution made it difficult to accept the Genesis tale of the creation of man as the literal truth. Another scientific breakthrough was the growing fascination with early psychology, and the acceptance that the mind and body were two separate entities and would need to be treated as such.

The dark underbelly of these scientific achievements was the rise of eugenics. Meaning 'good breeding', this was the view that desirable traits and characteristics could be filtered through to the next generations to ensure survival. Those



Around half of Victorian Britain attended Church each Sunday who believed in the practice of eugenics believed in the purported superiority over those with hereditary diseases or disabilities, or even, as previously mentioned, other races, and wanted to prohibit their rights to marry and procreate.

Although science was moving to the forefront and the people were adapting to the incredibly quick industrialisation of the world, the era was not entirely one of secularisation. Parallel to mainstream religion, belief in the supernatural and other alternative practices became incredibly popular. The Victorians' obsession with the supernatural, ghosts, and the occult is well known, both in history and in cultural impact – their ghost stories are still told today.

Mesmerism became a go-to medical treatment for a lot of ailments. It involved putting the subject into a trance, and then passing energy from somebody else into their body, almost as though they were recharging them. Famous writer Charles Dickens was a huge believer in this practice, and considered himself an expert mesmerist.

Despite the Bible being very clear about communicating with the dead, the Spiritualist movement took off in the late 19th century. The Fox sisters from New York claimed to have communicated with the spirit of a murder victim by having him knocking on wood, and while this was later proven to be a hoax, the desire to speak with spirits spread across Victorian Britain. Séances, led by mediums who could allegedly tap into the realm between the living and the dead, held huge fascination for people across all the social classes – even Queen Victoria was reportedly attracted to the allure of the occult.

Sense and sensuality

While remembered as being famously sexually repressed, it has since become clear that this view of the Victorians was not entirely true.

As previously mentioned, the staggering statistic of the number of Victorian women working in prostitution (around one sex worker for every 34 men in London alone) shows the appetite for sexual pleasure was most definitely burning.

Queen Victoria herself is reported to have waxed lyrical about her sex life with her husband Albert in letters, describing her own wedding night as a "gratifying and bewildering experience".

Her eldest son Edward was given the nickname 'Dirty Bertie' thanks to his known escapades in Parisian brothels, where he even had his own custom sex chair created, allegedly to allow him to have sex with multiple partners at the same time.

While it is evident that the Victorians were big fans of copulating, their obsession with morality often reared its head and this is clear in the expectations of women when it came to sex.

The Victorian double standard was the view that only men had sexual needs whereas women had no sexual desires at all, and only submitted to sex for their husband for the purpose of procreation.

Sex education was basically non-existent. Women were taught only the anatomical names

The trials of Oscar Wilde

A celebrity trial was the turning point for Victorian views on same sex relations

One of Britain's most famous and celebrated playwrights, Oscar Wilde, was also, at the time, a secret homosexual. Although married with two sons, he had an affair with Lord Alfred Douglas, a younger aristocrat and poet. When Douglas's father, the Marquess of Queensberry, discovered the relationship he accused Wilde publicly of being a "sodomite".

Wilde sued Queensberry for defamation, but he found himself under the glaring eye of the court. His novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which had homoerotic themes (including the seduction of a younger man by an older artist), was used to suggest that the accusations were not without merit. Wilde's lawyer convinced him to drop the lawsuit when he discovered that Queensberry was about to introduce several young men known to Wilde as witnesses.

It was, however, too late, and Wilde was arrested on charges of gross indecency. His first trial resulted in a hung jury, but the British government seemed intent on convicting Wilde. It has been alleged that the prime minister at the time, the Earl of Rosebery, had been having his own secret homosexual affair with Queensberry's other son and was under his own threat of exposure if he did not send Wilde to prison. The second trial found Wilde guilty and he was sentenced to two years hard labour which greatly damaged his health. He spent the last few years of his life living in exile and died in 1900 – ten months after Queensberry died of a stroke.

Wilde's prosecution resulted in attitudes towards homosexuality in Britain becoming less tolerant.

One of Wilde's most famous works, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, was used against him at his trial

The poisoned pen of prejudice

How Sherlock's creator uncovered the racial tension behind a miscarriage of justice

In 1903 a spate of mysterious and brutal animal mutilations began to plague the small mining village of Great Wyrley. The owners would discover their cows or horses gutted on the grass in the mornings, still alive and writhing in agony.

As the townsfolk grew to fear the 'Wyrley Ripper', who worked under the cover of darkness, and the police scratched their heads trying to catch him, a flurry of anonymous letters landed on people's doorsteps. These letters taunted the police and the locals, bragging of a gang of animal killers who struck at full moon.

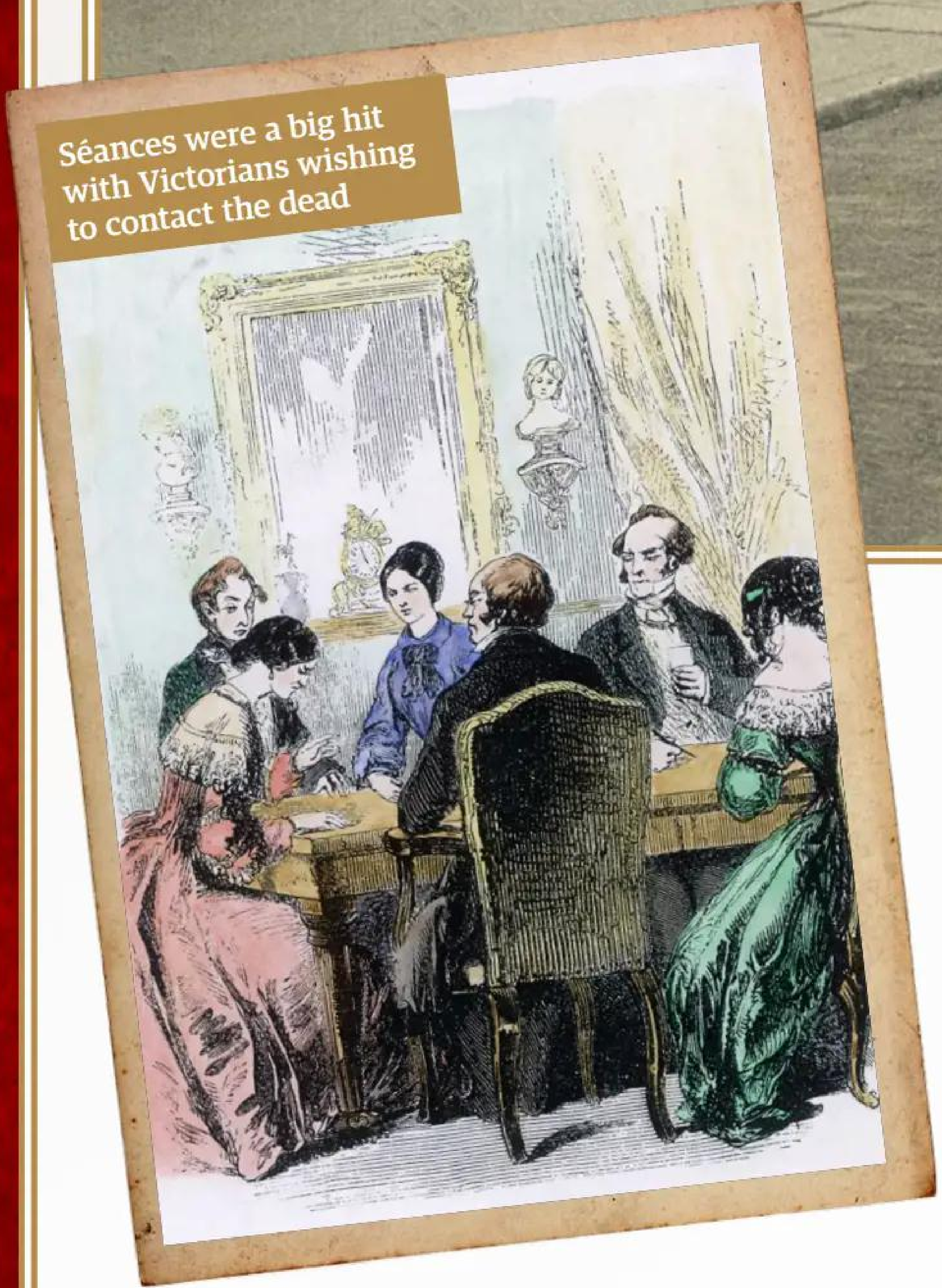
One of the letters pointed to a man called George Edalji, the vicar's son. Although the vicar and his family had been on the receiving end of such anonymous letters since 1888, some with a racist fuelled edge, the police began to suspect George and kept a close eye on him. Despite being a respectable solicitor working in Birmingham with alibis for the animal attacks, the chief constable was convinced George was the killer and had him arrested. He was found guilty and sentenced to seven years in jail.

Desperate to clear his name, George wrote to Arthur Conan Doyle, the author creator of Sherlock Holmes, who waded into the case with gusto. He completed his own investigations and published his findings in national newspapers, discovering the chief constable's own prejudices against what he called the "Hindoo vicar". Despite never finding out who the real killer was, Arthur Conan Doyle exposed the police's flimsy evidence and eventually secured George's freedom.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle took a leaf out of his own detective books to find the truth

© Getty, Alamy

Holywell Street, London, was famous for being a gateway to all sorts of smutty literature



Séances were a big hit with Victorians wishing to contact the dead

> "In order to avoid sexual cravings, the Victorians were advised to eat bland foods and avoid spices or anything that tantalised their senses"

of their sexual organs in order to dissuade them from investigating their own bodies and causing irritation. As female sexuality was deemed not to exist, women who masturbated were deemed "truly deranged". Men, on the other hand, were warned against masturbation with the threat that an excessive loss of semen would result in disease and death.

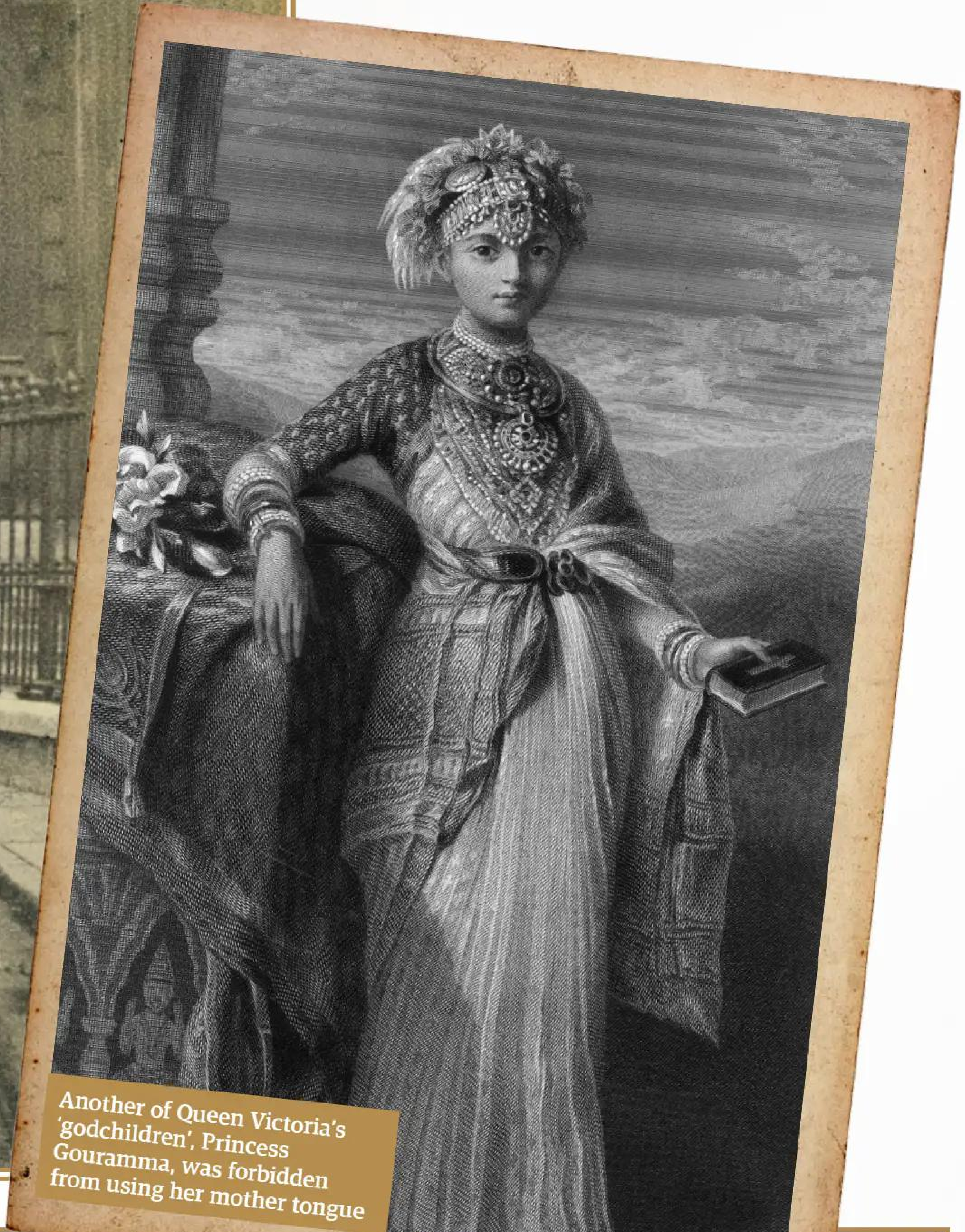
In order to avoid sexual cravings, the Victorians were advised to eat bland foods and avoid spices or anything that tantalised their senses. This theory went on to inspire the invention of Corn Flakes in America.

Pornography also prospered during the Victorian era. Holywell Street in London was a well-known spot to pick up indecent media. Bookstores here stocked all sorts of smut and erotica, shocking and enticing browsers with such titles as *Captain Stroke-All's Pocket Book* and *The Autobiography of a Flea*. The latter is narrated by the titular flea who hops on a young woman and describes the incredibly explicit adventures of her life, including incest and lustful clergymen. A recurring theme in these works is that of masochistic sex, punishment and whipping, perhaps a subconscious reaction to the strict morality preached publicly.

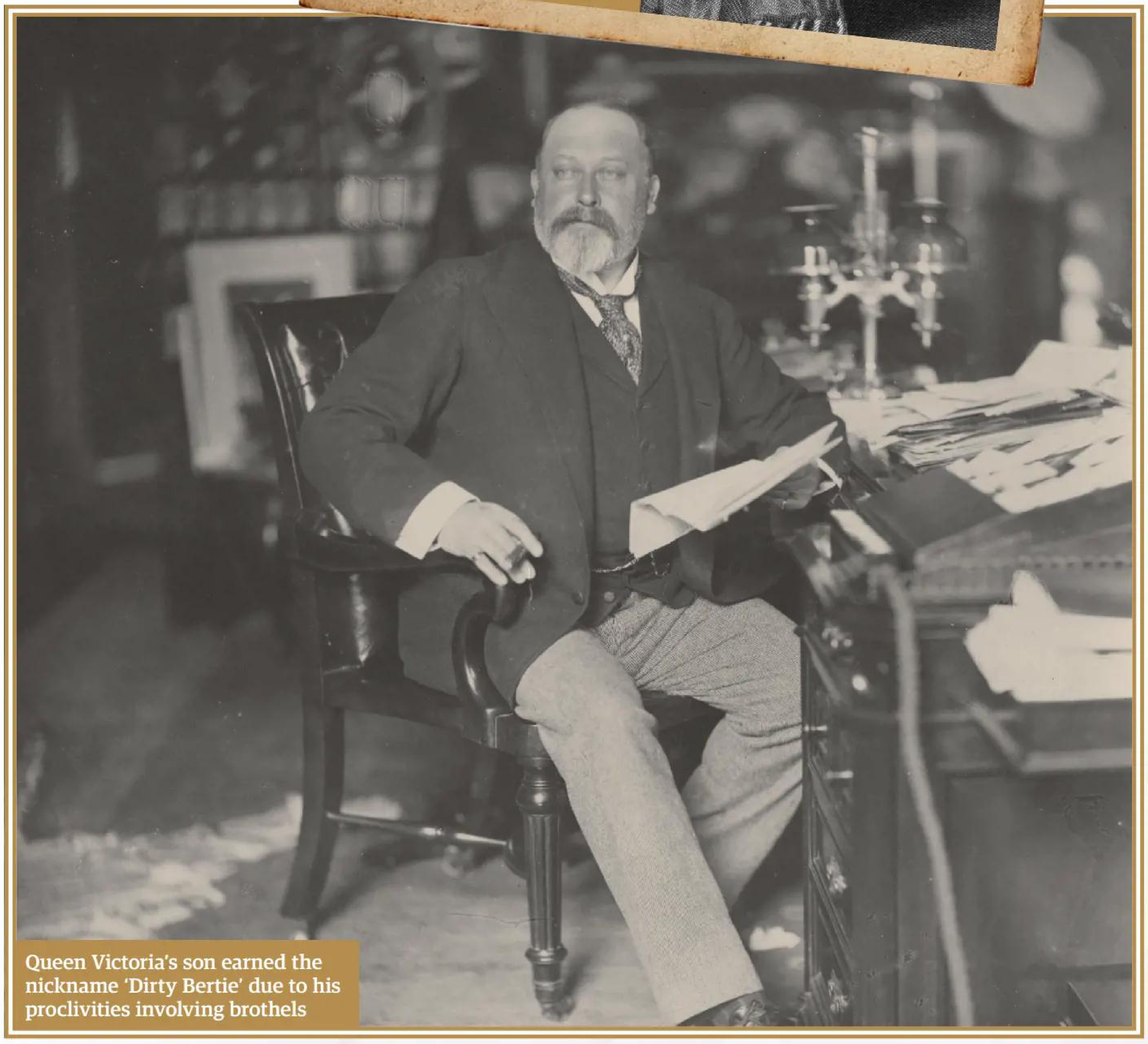
Same-sex relations were also included among the bawdy Victorian smut available at the time, but in society it was deemed very much taboo.

The topic was so frowned upon that it was very rarely spoken about publicly, and so explicit homophobia was a very rare occurrence as the majority of people had no real opinion on it as they were not that educated on the topic.

However, the law at the time made it very clear what Victorian society thought about homosexuality. Up until 1861 men engaging in sodomy (anal sex) could face the death sentence.



Another of Queen Victoria's 'godchildren', Princess Gouramma, was forbidden from using her mother tongue



Queen Victoria's son earned the nickname 'Dirty Bertie' due to his proclivities involving brothels

When this was abolished, a life sentence of hard labour replaced it, arguably a longer, more punishable death.

As the law stated that it was the act of sodomy itself that was the crime, prosecutors often went to extreme lengths to prove their accusations. Those who weren't caught in the act by police and detectives found themselves subject to horrific physical examinations by doctors, such as in the case of Boulton and Park. The two men were arrested by police in 1870 while leaving a theatre after being seen to enter a private box while dressed as women. The doctor's evidence was found to be unreliable in court and they were both found not guilty.

A decade later, in 1885, the government passed an amendment into law which criminalised 'gross indecency'. This vague wording allowed police to prosecute gay men without having to present proof that sodomy had actually occurred, in fact any sexual act between men could be the basis of a criminal charge. This law was also used to arrest drag artists (men dressed as women) and as a reason to raid gay brothels.

One such brothel, on Cleveland Street, resulted in a huge scandal when it was revealed that members of aristocratic families were implicated within the pages of its client lists, including Prince Albert Victor, son of the Prince of Wales.

However, out of the 280,000 cases of men being charged with having sex with each other between the 1850s and 1960s, only 313 of these were brought to court during the Victorian era, and as time went on the sentences dished out became more lenient. This leniency did not offset the social scandal that accompanied a criminal prosecution – many men went on to attempt suicide rather than face the shame of becoming a social outcast.

Same-sex relations between women were, by reports, much more widely accepted. Women were absent from the laws prohibiting homosexual activity – and not due to a popular myth that Queen Victoria vetoed them because "women wouldn't do such a thing". It was simply down to a combination of the Victorian idea of women as delicate beings with no sexual urges, who were more at mercy to their emotions and easily corruptible, and the fear that bringing attention to it could make it catch on. As such, lesbian relationships were reportedly often overlooked or went unnoticed.

The moral high ground?

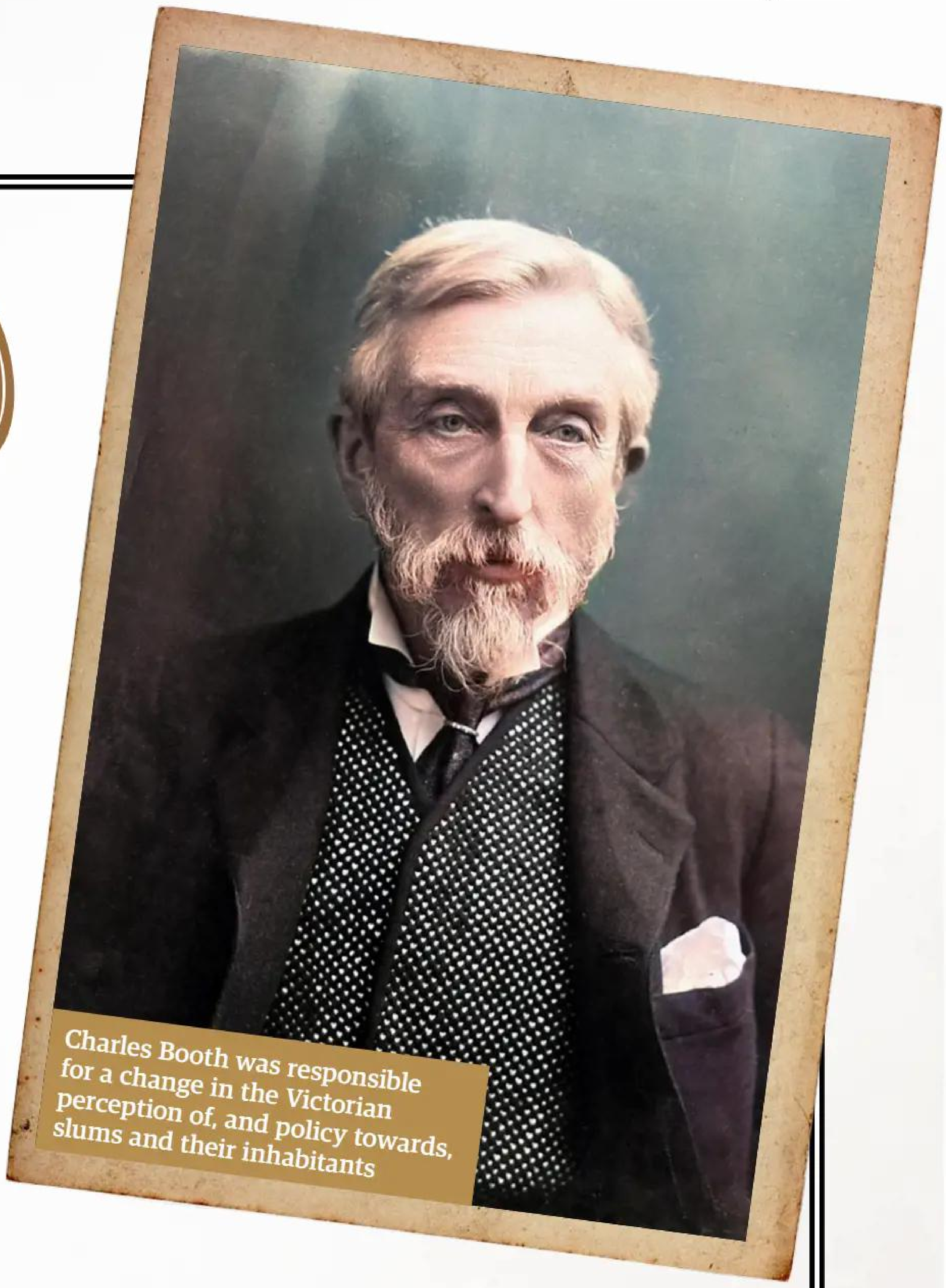
The combination of the Victorians' obsession with strict morality, old taboos, and their fascination with the rise of new scientific discoveries resulted in a society with complex and often contradictory views. While the popular myth of a stuffy, repressed reputation has followed the Victorian era into the present day, it's clear that there was a lot more than meets the eye, albeit hidden away behind closed doors and down secret alleyways.

SLUMMING

IT

Far from being paved with gold, the streets of Victorian London were teeming with dirt, despair, disenfranchisement and deprivation for the city's poorest inhabitants

Written by April Madden



Charles Booth was responsible for a change in the Victorian perception of, and policy towards, slums and their inhabitants

London was the beating heart of Victoria's British Empire, and yet the capital of the civilisation that the sun never set upon hid a bloated, fetid disease behind the elegant promenades and squares it showed to the rest of the world. London was riddled with slums, where the poorest of the city's denizens lived packed in cheek-by-jowl, with filth and ordure as their neighbours. To be a slum dweller was to live a miserable life curtailed by grinding poverty, hunger, exploitation, addiction and disease, a life that very few well-to-do Victorians believed its victims deserved to escape. Slum dwellers were, by and large, the 'Undeserving Poor', with little to no entitlement to parish relief, and few opportunities to achieve a decent or dignified job – no right-thinking Victorian lady would have someone like that among the servants; no upstanding Victorian gentleman would trust one of them in his business. If they were that desperate, they could always go to the workhouse, couldn't they? The fact that they didn't showed that their life of crime, of low entertainment and even lower morals, was endemic to them.

Would you be surprised to learn that it was the Victorians who created the rhetoric we now hear governments use against long-term benefits claimants, social housing tenants and the chronically underqualified? 'They don't want to work. They're not as sick as they're making out. They should have paid attention at school when they had the chance. Why don't they economise properly? The only way they'll change their feckless behaviour is if they're penalised.' For the Victorians, the people who fell through the cracks of society did so deliberately. Perhaps it was so unthinkable that such deprivation could exist en masse in the ancient, storied capital of the world's richest, most advanced, most powerful empire, that the only way they could make sense of it was to believe that the slum-dwelling poor were the architects of their own suffering.

Slums grew like a cancer on the rapidly changing face of 19th-century London, and the majority were created by the transformation that the city experienced in the late Georgian and early Victorian era. Up until the 19th century, the city had featured many more open spaces than it does today. In the 18th century, market gardens had supplied London with fruits and vegetables – Georgian Londoners even had access to homegrown melons and pineapples. With the rise of Britain's overseas empire and new and faster ship technologies, such delicacies no longer had to be grown at home – they could be transported halfway across the world in the ironclad belly of a steamship. The market gardens were no longer needed, and fell into disrepair. Meanwhile,

> "To be a slum dweller was to live a miserable life curtailed by grinding poverty"

© Getty; Alamy

before Wren and his ilk had rebuilt the old city in Portland stone after the Great Fire in 1666, medieval and Tudor London had been riddled with marsh meadows that were of little use to anyone. As London's rivers were encased in stone embankments and underground culverts, these patches of traditionally underused land dried out. And as the city grew to swallow what had once been villages on its outskirts – Hackney, Islington, Greenwich, Chelsea, Kew – what in the past had been thriving country farmsteads were abandoned and became yet more gaps in London's tangled urban fabric.

These waste grounds were where slums arose. In the 'Potteries and Piggeries' near Notting Hill, potters who had traditionally lived near sources of London clay found themselves sharing their space with pig keepers who had been forced to move away from their traditional site in Tottenham Court Road. Brickmakers too, a notoriously rowdy group primarily composed of young, single, hard-drinking men, moved into the area, and soon it became known as Cut Throat Lane. Little changed since medieval times, but by the mid-19th century the area had become a shanty town. Not only was there no sanitation infrastructure, the waste from pig farming soon built up in the boreholes from which the potters and brick makers extracted their clay. One of these slurry pits was so large it was nicknamed The Ocean. In 1850, Charles Dickens wrote of the place that it was "a plague spot scarcely equalled for its insalubrity by any other in London".

Gentrification tried to come for the Potteries and Piggeries in the 1830s with the building of a horse racing course called the Kensington Hippodrome. It wasn't a success, and many visitors complained about the appearance and behaviour of the nearby

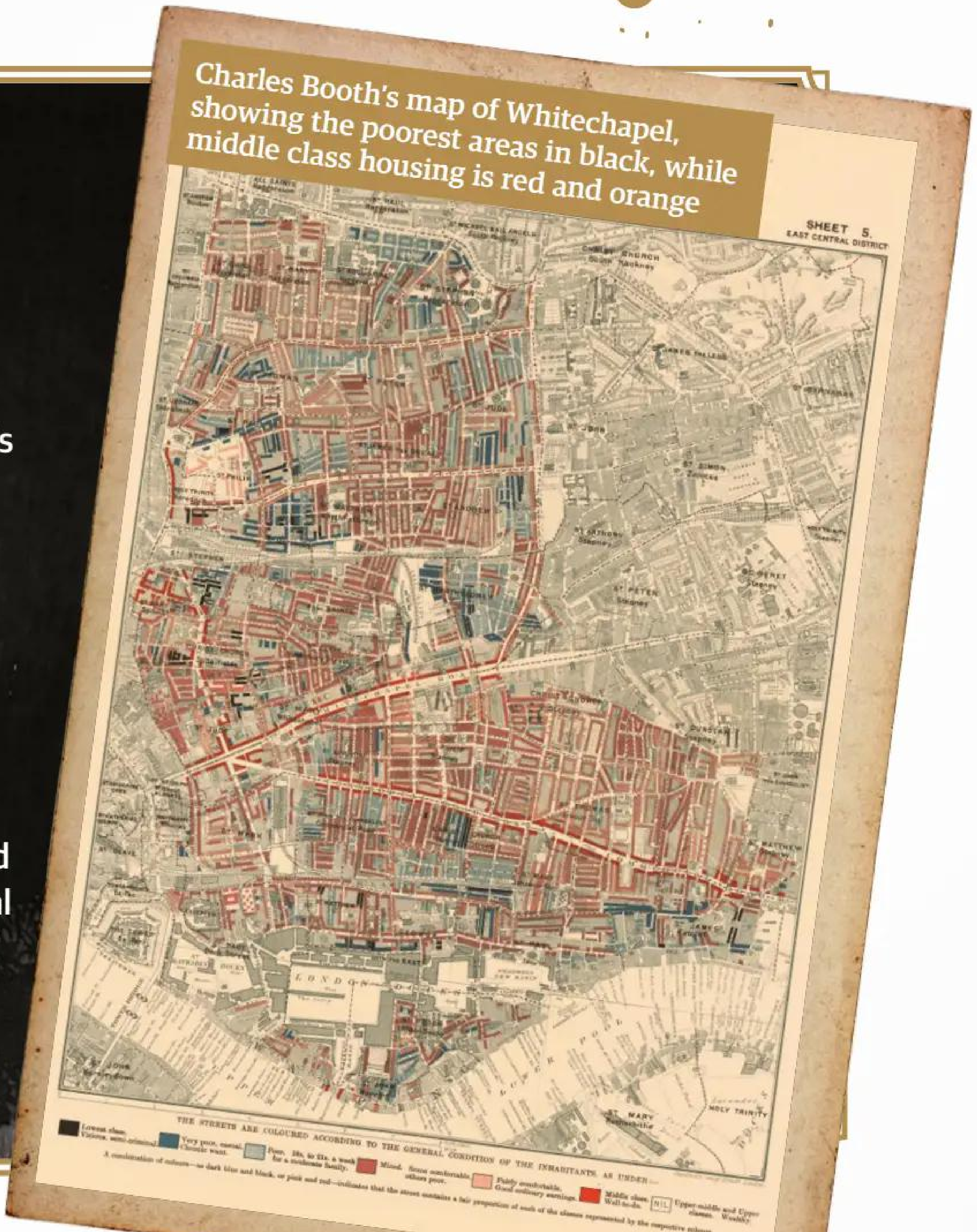
Slum housing was precarious and unregulated; tenants like these could easily be evicted by their slum landlord

> "Poor Londoners were desperate for housing as the city expanded and they were crowded out of their previous homes by wealthier incomers"

Mapping poverty

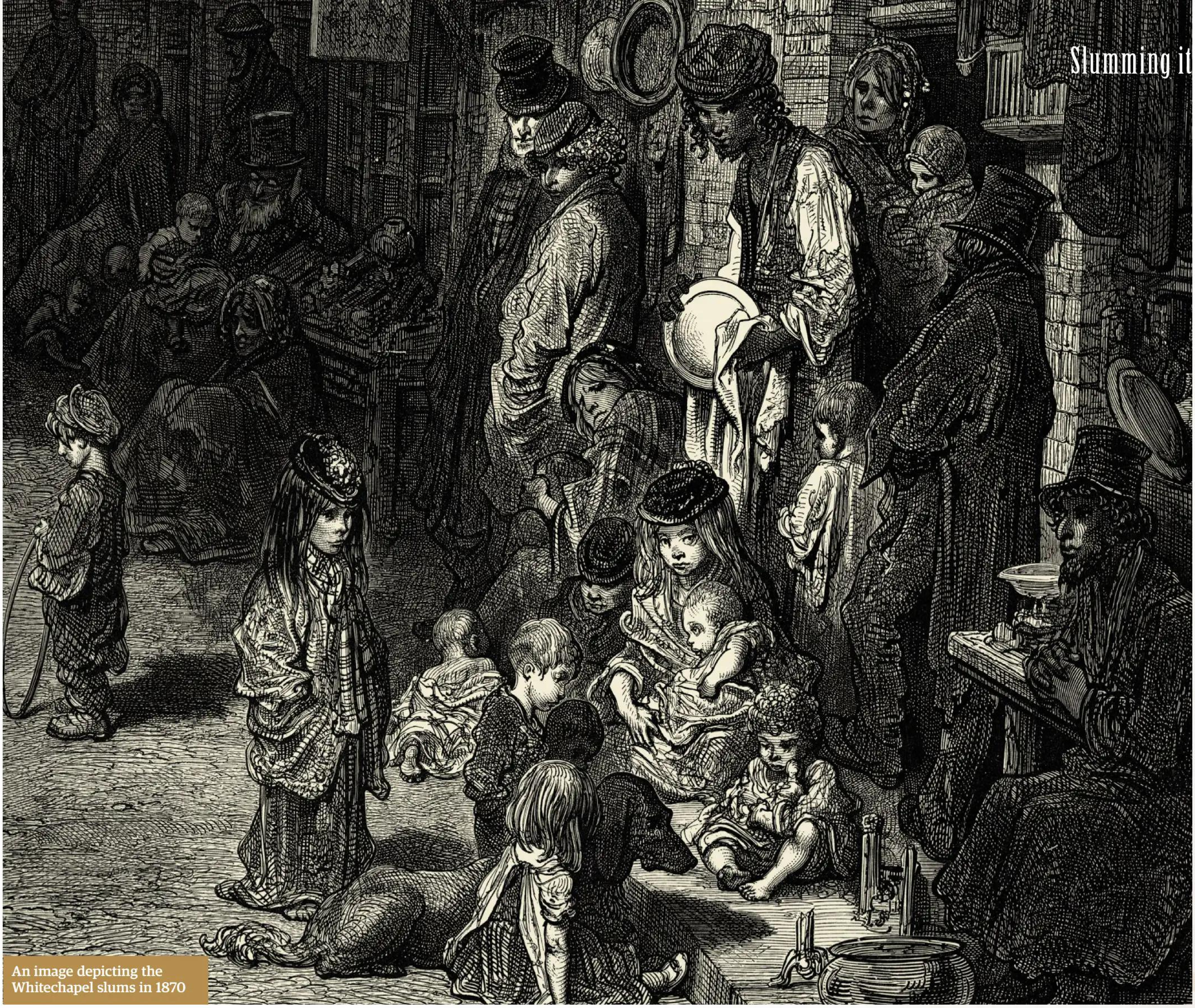
Booth's research highlighted the plight of slum dwellers in London and challenged the Victorians' views on them

On Charles Booth's maps, the London streets are displayed in an array of colours, with sunny gold and red threads picking out the presence of the wealthy, well-to-do and the ordinary and comfortable. But blocked onto every district in solid, funereal blues, greys and black lie the instances of the worst poverty and deprivation too. Here the poor are scraping by on 18 shillings or less a week (roughly the equivalent of one day's wages for a skilled tradesman in 1900), gained through casual work… or worse. Booth's key for his poverty maps describes areas labelled in black as the domain of the "Lowest class. Vicious, semi-criminal"; the stereotypical Victorian slum dweller who was believed to spend what ill-gotten gains they had on gin while their children starved: petty thieves, prostitutes, card-sharps, gamblers and tramps. Today, Booth's maps are criticised for their colour-coding and the way it makes the poor look like a disease raddling the London streets, but the impact of those big blots of black ink was to demonstrate to the public that poverty was, in fact, hidden all around them, and that for many seemingly prosperous and hard-working families, the deprivation of the slums was little more than a lost job or family crisis away. Booth's research led to the concept of the poverty line, the theoretical minimum income that a family could live on, and also contributed to the creation of the old age pension and, consequently, the welfare state and the NHS.



Charles Booth's map of Whitechapel, showing the poorest areas in black, while middle class housing is red and orange

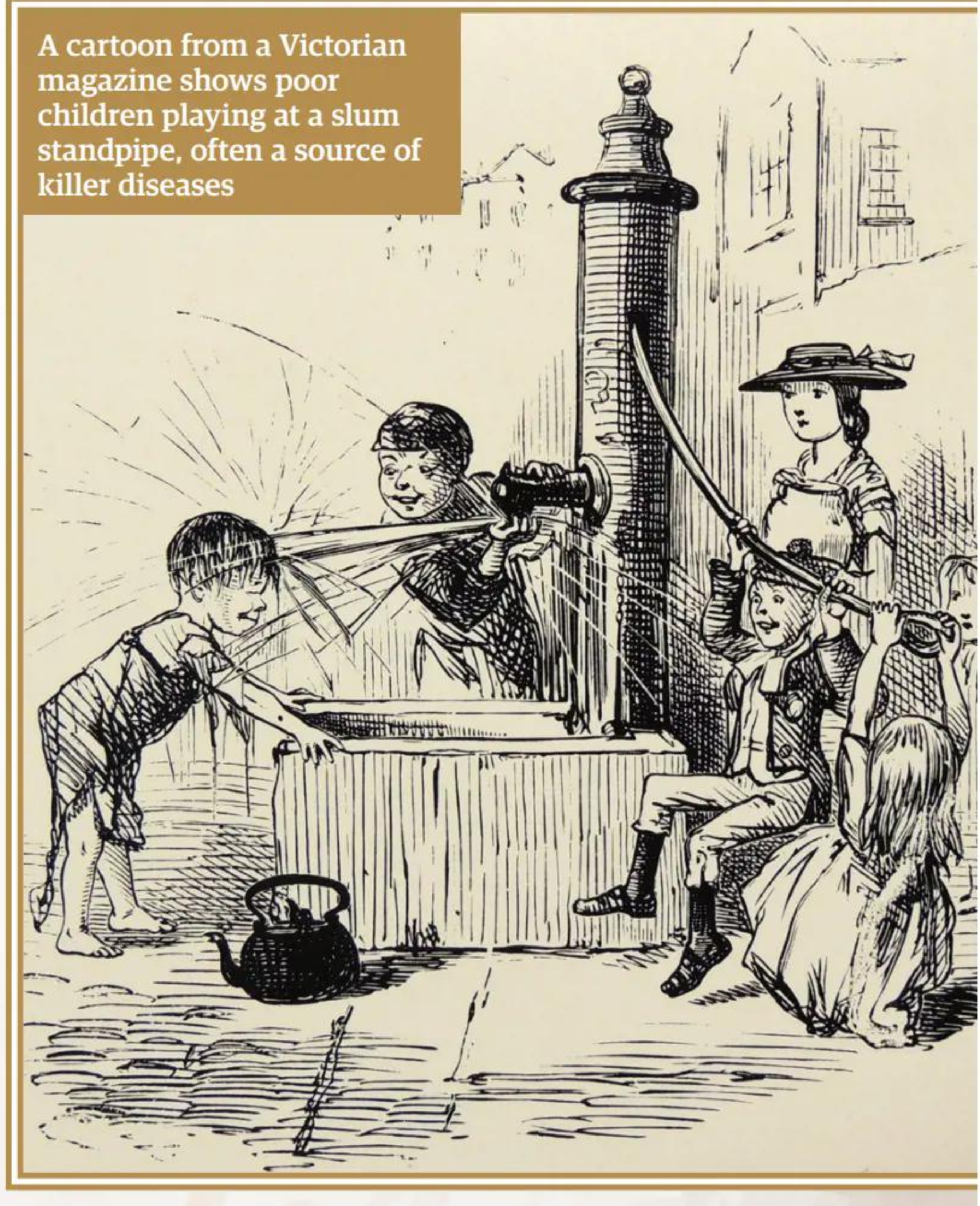
© Getty; Alamy



An image depicting the Whitechapel slums in 1870

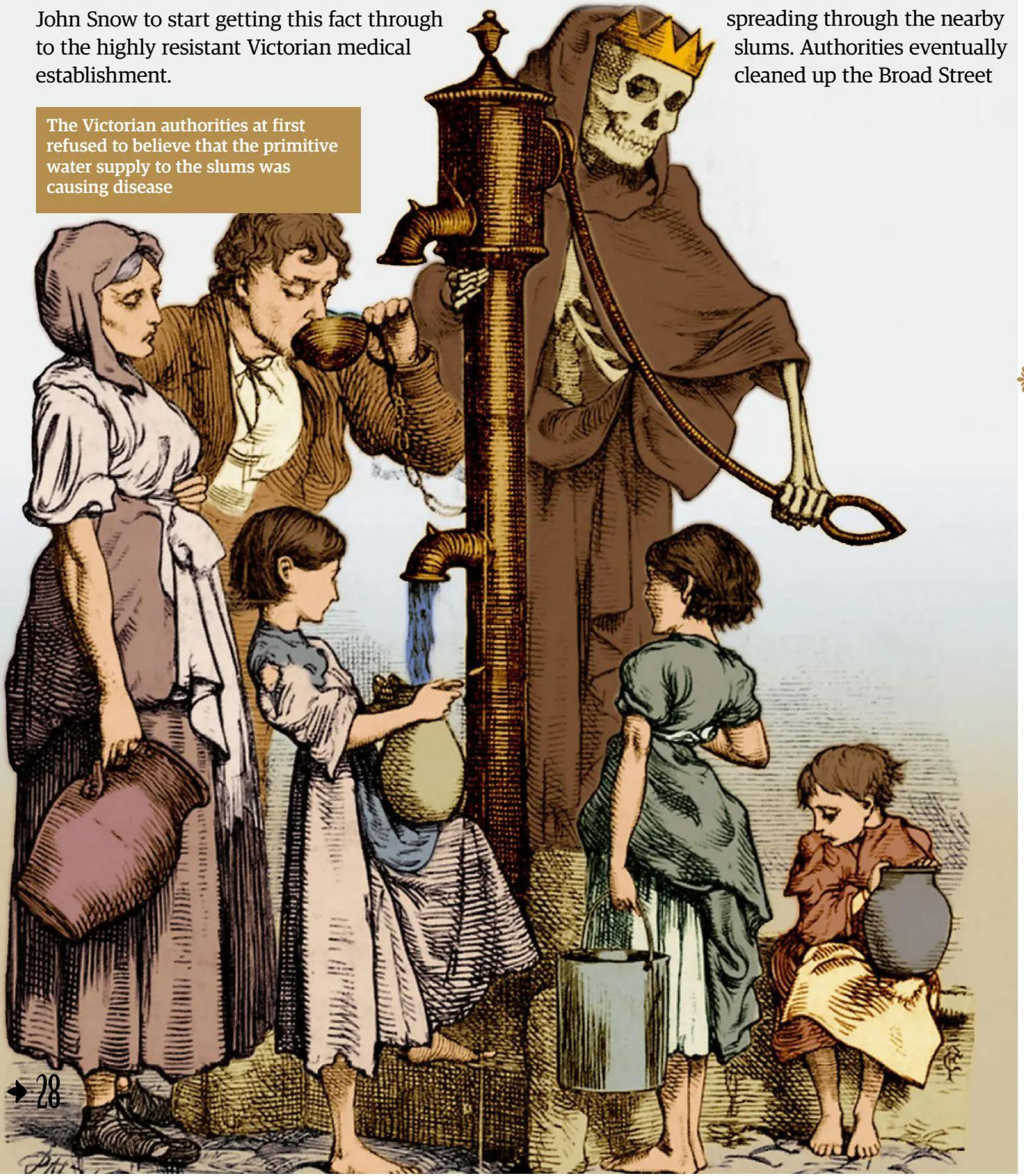
slum dwellers, who had a right of way over the land. The Hippodrome closed in 1842 but it would take the entire redevelopment of the land of the Ladbroke Estate, completed in the 1870s, to effect any real transformation. Today, the area is one of the wealthiest in London, home to aristocrats, celebrities and the super-rich. The Ocean is now the leafy, flower-filled Avondale Park. There is still poor housing and tragedy to be found on these not-so-mean streets though; nearby is the site of Grenfell Tower, a social housing high-rise which in 2017 was the site of the UK's worst residential fire since World War II. Caused by a faulty fridge freezer, the fire, which killed over 70 people and injured hundreds more, was significantly worsened by inadequate building materials and lax safety standards.

Poor building and safety standards would be familiar to many Victorian slum dwellers. The Potteries and Piggeries had been self-built by its dwellers, but many slums were the work of unscrupulous builders. Poor Londoners were desperate for housing as the city expanded and they were crowded out of their previous homes by wealthier incomers. Landlords looking to make a relatively quick buck would let parcels of waste ground – those old market gardens, farmyards and marshes – from the estates or corporations that owned them. With leases that ran for a maximum of 21 years, there was no incentive for these developers to create proper housing, as it would soon be torn down again. Thrown up onto land that was already damp and sinking into a muddy strata of centuries of sewage or farmyard filth, places like Tyndall's-buildings (aka Spread Eagle Court) in Holborn, Agar Town near King's Cross, and Tomlin's New Town in Paddington, were named after the slum lords that built them and featured foundationless, one-up-one-down, back-to-back hovels with dirt floors, walls just half a brick thick, no running water or sanitary facilities and only open hearths for cooking on, and no paved streets or drains in between. Accessed through a warren of stinking alleys, rough courtyards here and there provided locations for water standpipes and open defecation, the earth-closet privies between the buildings often unusable because they were overflowing with raw sewage from the cesspits below. In such conditions, disease ran rife.



A cartoon from a Victorian magazine shows poor children playing at a slum standpipe, often a source of killer diseases

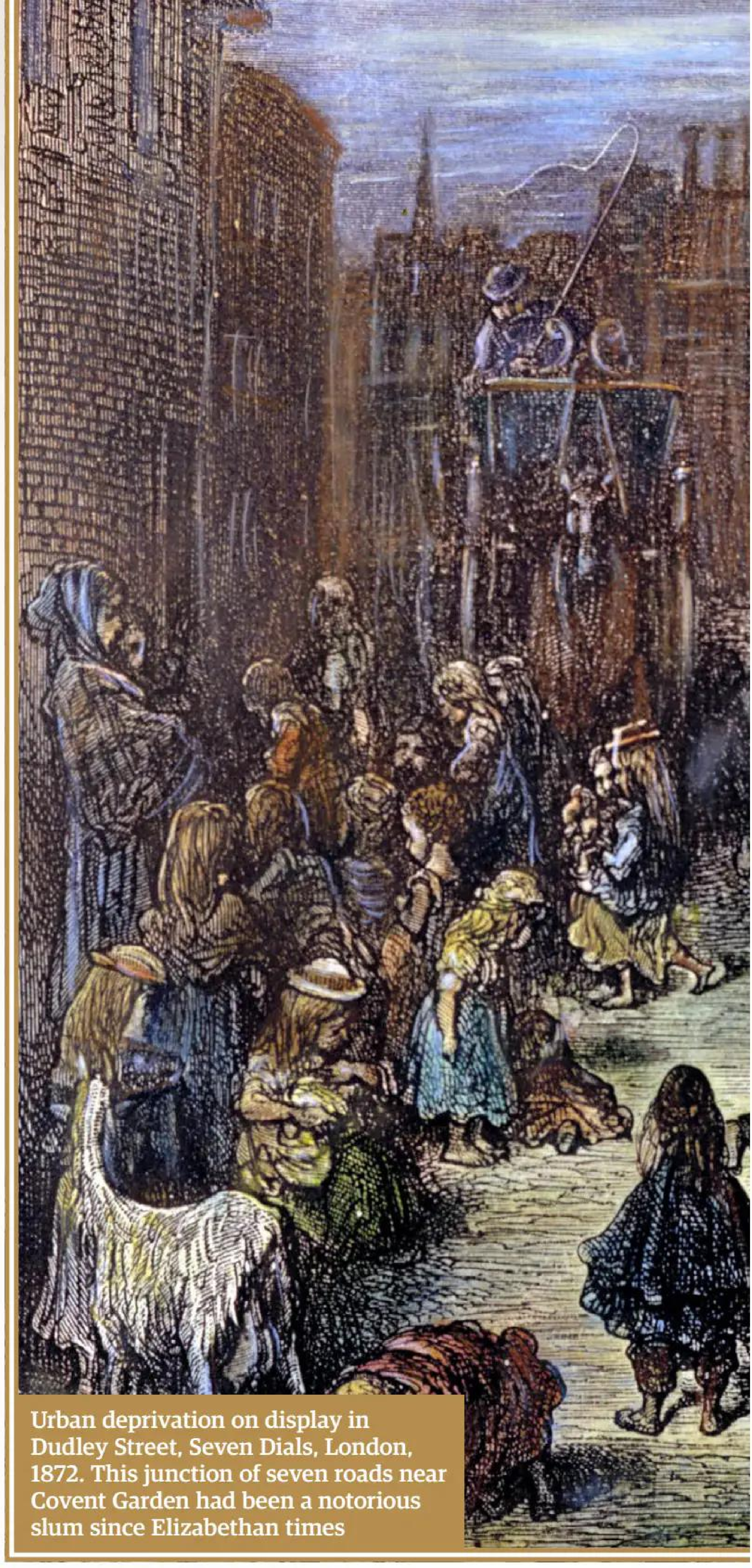
Cholera had arrived in Britain from India with the advent of the massive increase in international shipping brought about by the Victorian British Empire. Potentially fatal, it causes severe vomiting and diarrhoea, contact with which infects new victims. But Victorian scientists were still on the cusp of understanding disease transmission – in fact, it was cholera that began to bring their understanding into focus. At the beginning of the Victorian era, ideas about how disease was borne and spread hadn't really changed since medieval times. The dominant theory was that disease was spread by 'miasma' – a 'foul air' that coalesced over sources of dirt. Its stinking smell was its signature. Dr William Farr, the commissioner of the 1851 London census and an epidemiologist who was one of the first collectors of medical statistics, believed that the very soil of London was riddled with miasma, which rose occasionally like marsh gas and, in yet another example of the poorest Londoners bringing their suffering on themselves through their filthy lifestyle choices, disgorged itself into the slums. We now know of course that this is not the case and that cholera, like other diseases, is transmitted through bacterial exposure, but it took the 1854 cholera outbreak and the efforts of a Yorkshire doctor named John Snow to start getting this fact through to the highly resistant Victorian medical establishment.



The Victorian authorities at first refused to believe that the primitive water supply to the slums was causing disease

Before coming to London in 1837, Snow had dealt with cholera in the coal-mining village of Killingworth. His experiences there had made him a proponent of good hygiene and healthy living: he was teetotal, vegetarian, and, crucially, he would only drink 'pure' distilled water. It was Snow's focus on water that would help to revolutionise Victorian medical science – and the slums.

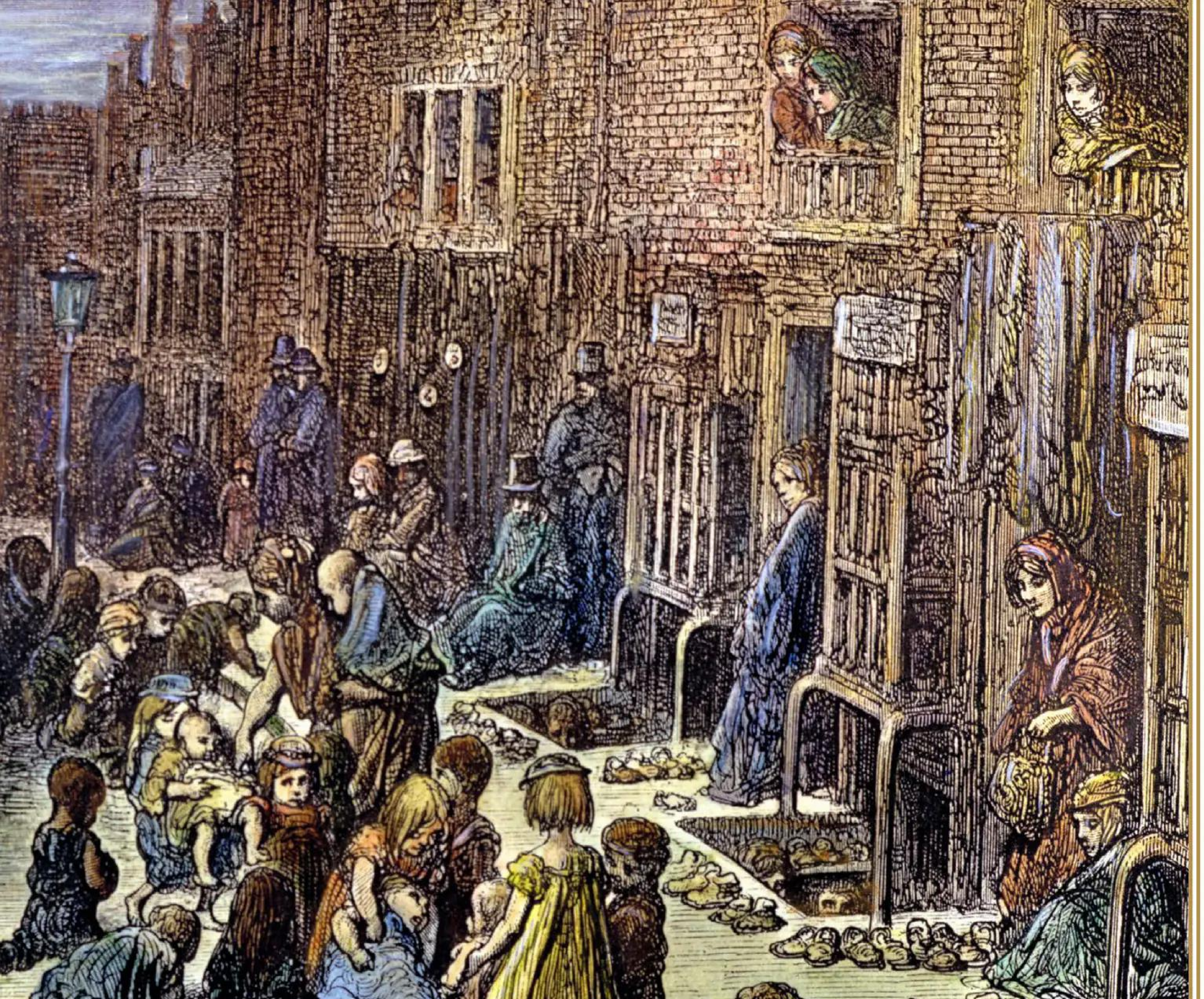
During the cholera outbreak that centred around Broad Street in Soho, then an overpopulated slum built on an unsanitary backbone of cowsheds, slaughterhouses and grease-boilers, Snow analysed the water that residents took from the local pump, and found it riddled with fecal matter and bacteria. London at the time was the scene of fierce competition between several different water companies, and Snow had observed that the smaller ones, which tended to filter and purify their water, had less presence in areas that were affected by cholera, while the bigger companies that drew directly from the River Thames were almost always the suppliers to areas that experienced the most disease and death. Snow discovered that the Broad Street pump was contaminated with cholera-laden raw sewage, and this was how the disease was spreading through the nearby slums. Authorities eventually cleaned up the Broad Street pump and replaced its handle, but after the worst of the cholera epidemic had passed, they squeamishly refused to consider Snow's research into how the disease was actually spread. Snow was an early proponent of germ theory, and he argued that it was ingesting water contaminated with cholera-ridden fecal matter that was actually causing the devastating outbreaks. Scientists and city authorities alike tried their best to ignore and even discredit his evidence, and it would take the work of a later Victorian social reformer to really bring about infrastructural change in the slums.

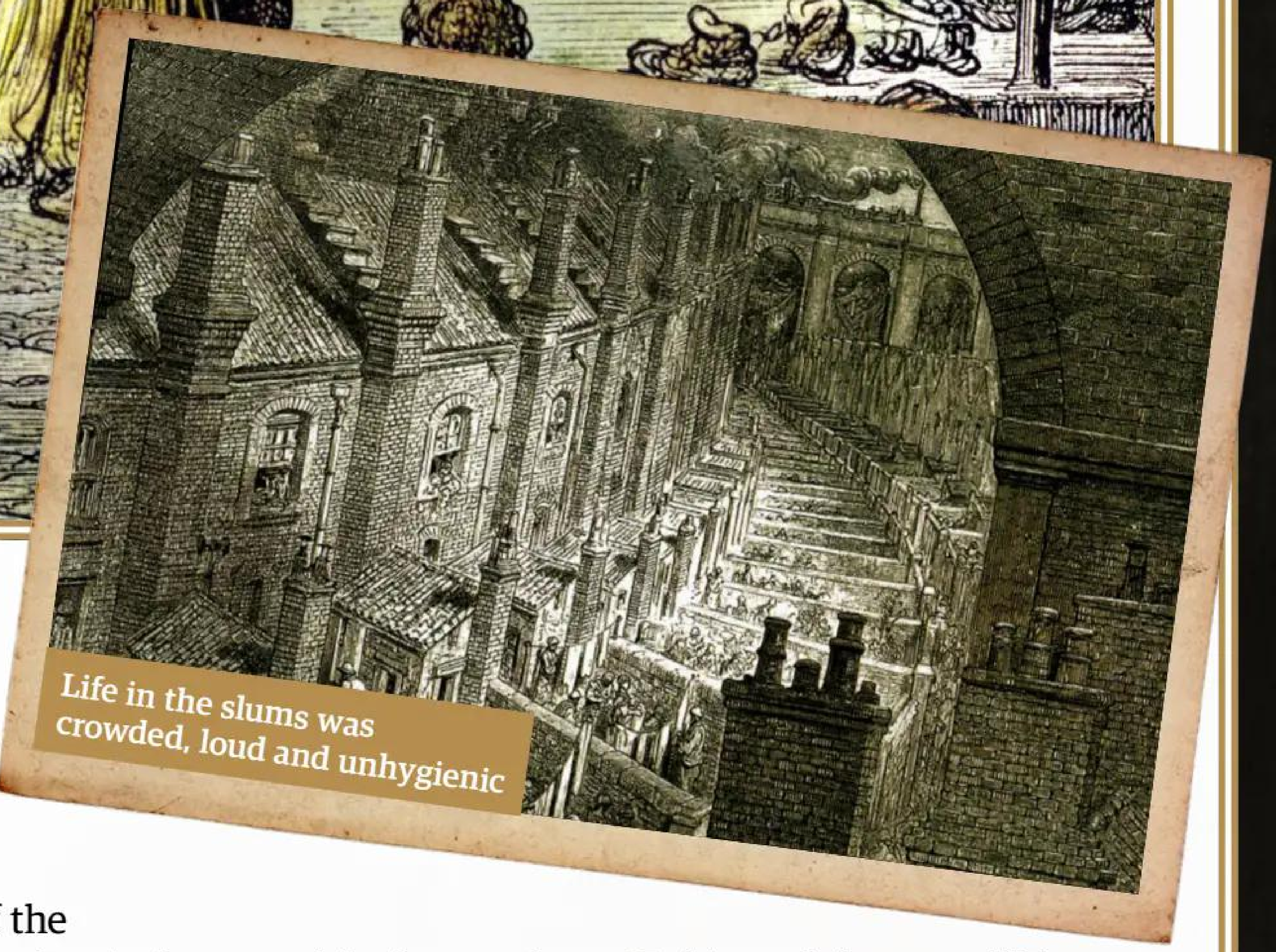


Urban deprivation on display in Dudley Street, Seven Dials, London, 1872. This junction of seven roads near Covent Garden had been a notorious slum since Elizabethan times

"Snow discovered that the Broad Street pump was contaminated with cholera-laden raw sewage"

Like the misguided Dr William Farr, Charles Booth was interested in statistics and census data. A wealthy shipowner, Booth was influenced by a school of philosophy called positivism, which holds that all genuine knowledge can be proved by facts and evidence – an outlook deeply





Life in the slums was crowded, loud and unhygienic

appealing to the rich industrialists who, instead of adopting the Victorian vogue for mythmaking, spiritualism and the supernatural that was so popular among the aristocratic classes, were inheritors of the 18th-century rationalism that continued to fuel the Industrial Revolution. Booth was the author of a multi-volume book – by its third edition in 1903 it comprised 17 volumes – called *Life and Labour of the People in London*, in which he went into exhaustive detail about the working lives and living conditions of London's poorer classes.

Booth's book was revolutionary. After analysing Farr's census he declared the data inadequate, unsatisfactory and skewed, embarking instead on his own intensive research. His research revealed that 35 per cent of people in the East End of London alone lived in abject poverty; in slum housing without adequate access to drinkable water, sanitation, sufficient heating (in the Victorian era, Britain was in the throes of what has now been dubbed the Little Ice Age, a climactic event characterised by lower than normal temperatures), nourishing food or decent warm clothing. And unlike many other Victorians, even those who thought themselves philanthropists, Booth didn't blame the poor for the social ills visited upon them. He blamed the casual labour that didn't guarantee working men and women long-term employment or proper wages that they could spend on decent accommodation, clothing and food. He did away with the idea that poverty and social class were inextricably linked, and crucially he blamed the slums for the existence of their inhabitants, not the other way around.

Booth's research is not without fault – his descriptions of social classes are still loaded with negative descriptors and in some cases, outright racism and antisemitism, focused particularly on Irish and Jewish immigrants. But within his book, he showcased 'poverty maps' on which Londoners could see, in full colour, the overwhelming prevalence of the poverty that hid behind the leafy avenues and elaborately designed boulevards of the imperial city – and that something had to change. Booth's work was what finally transformed the Victorian perception of the slums, and put their inhabitants on the path to what, one day, would become a better standard of living.

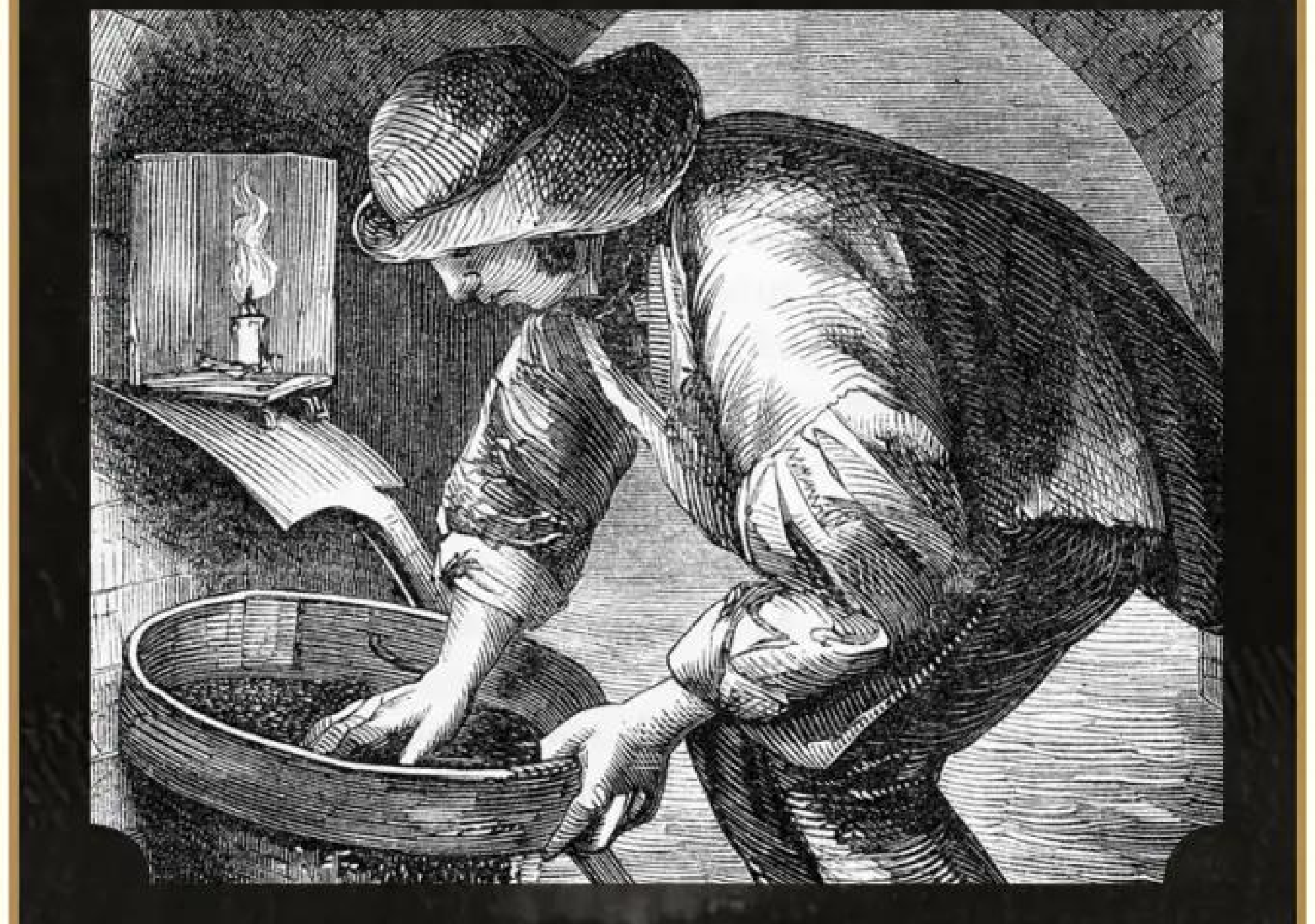
Naming the slums

The origins behind Victorian terms for slums

Thanks to the Victorian contempt for slum dwellers, there were (and are) numerous colloquial terms for slums that existed to further demean and other their inhabitants. 'Warren' refers to a rabbit burrow, and while its principal meaning is to describe the narrow, twisting alleys that make up slum streets, it also connotes rabbits' tendency to breed quickly and often until their underground home is overrun, causing competition for resources that breeds starvation and aggression. For Victorian moral absolutists, the implication of projecting this animal behaviour onto slum dwellers is clear. Prostitutes were often described as living in warrens.

'Rookery' is one of the oldest terms for a slum and is often found describing those that had existed since medieval or Tudor times, such as St Giles Rookery. Rooks, a type of crow, roost in colonies made up of untidy, sprawling nests; their social groups are noisy and raucous and rooks are notorious for stealing. The term was often used to describe the dead-end alleys that criminals used to either funnel their marks into or protect themselves from other ne'er-do-wells. Rookeries were the homes of street urchins and other criminals; dangerous areas that were best avoided.

Shanty towns are slums made up of shacks and hovels, largely temporary and usually made out of materials that have been scavenged. These would usually grow up near a source of subsistence income like a rubbish tip – or worse. Rag and bone pickers, street sweepers and toshers – those who picked through Victorian sewers in the hope of finding coins or other valuables – might live here.



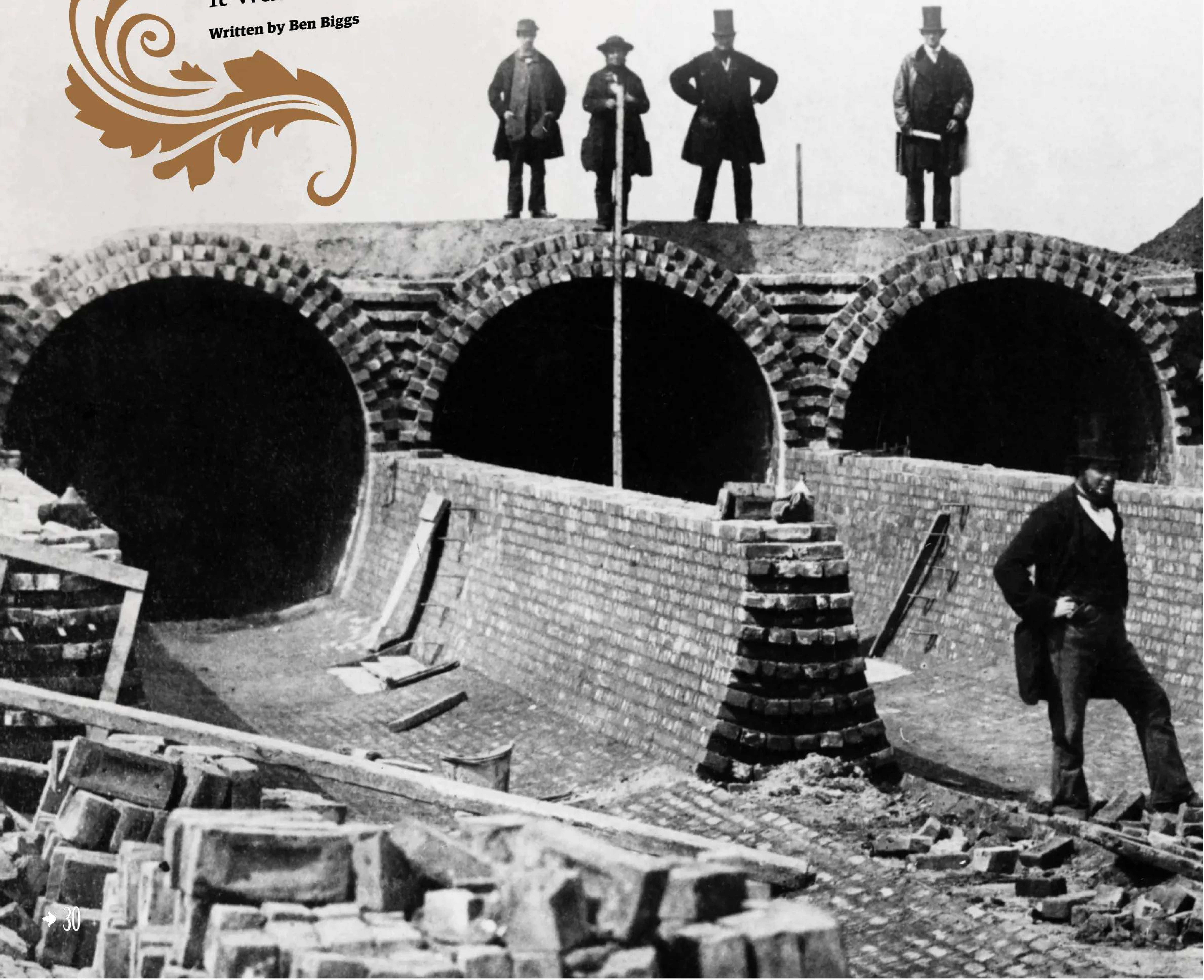
A Victorian tosher at work. These slum dwellers were so poor their only source of income was picking through the sewers

© Getty; Alamy

The GREAT STINK

There was a horrible whiff around the Houses of Parliament in the summer of 1858 and for once, it was nothing to do with bad politicians

Written by Ben Biggs



Evidence of human settlements along the river Thames dates far back into the Bronze Age, but London as a permanent settlement was only established on the north bank after the 1st century CE Roman invasion of Britain. We have a pretty good idea of what this river looked like as it snaked past the wood and stone fortifications of Londinium 2,000 years ago: verdant banks of reeds teeming with water fowl and salt marshland that ran into lazy dark waters, roiling with silvery schools of fish. With an area of around 350 acres, Londinium itself was a tiny fraction of the size of London today and had a population that peaked at around 60,000, before it was abandoned with the fall of Roman Empire and repopulated again centuries later. The future capital city and one of the world's major metropolises was once dwarfed by this anaconda of a waterway that meandered in great loops for miles before it emptied into the North Sea. And it was a healthy, clean river. Locals wouldn't have wanted to drink the brackish water in the Thames but Londoners back then wouldn't have thought twice about taking a dip in the shallows on a hot day.

Today, the Port of London Authority restricts swimming in the Thames to a stretch upriver of Putney Bridge in west London, listing hazards that include strong currents, river vessels… and sewage discharges.

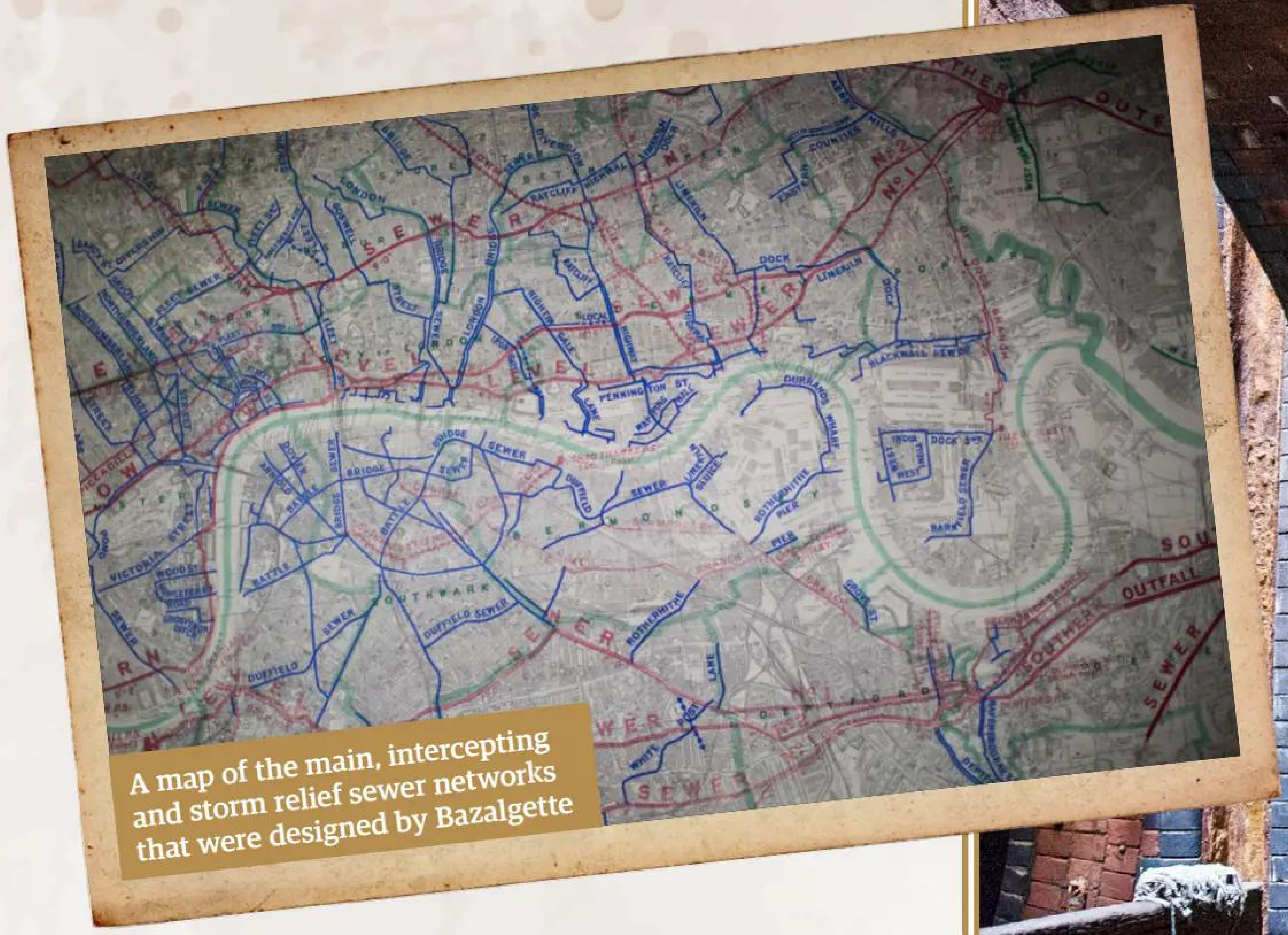
But despite this city of nearly 10 million people washing and flushing toilets on a daily basis, the Thames isn't anywhere near as dirty as it was in the mid-19th century, when it was choked with the runoff from smoke-belching factories, freshly minted in the height of the Industrial Revolution; when abattoirs and refuse collectors used the river as a convenient dumping ground, and when the water was so thick with human effluent that it was said to "ooze" rather than flow. The satirical *Punch* magazine published a number of cartoons on the state of the Thames, including "Dirty Father Thames" in 1848, which ran with a poem by William Newman: "Filthy river, filthy river, Foul from London to the Nore, What art thou but one vast gutter, One tremendous common shore…" Newspapers such as the *Times* regularly ran with headlines damning the foul condition of the river water and even Charles Dickens wrote about the Thames being "a deadly sewer" in his serialised novel *Little Dorrit*.

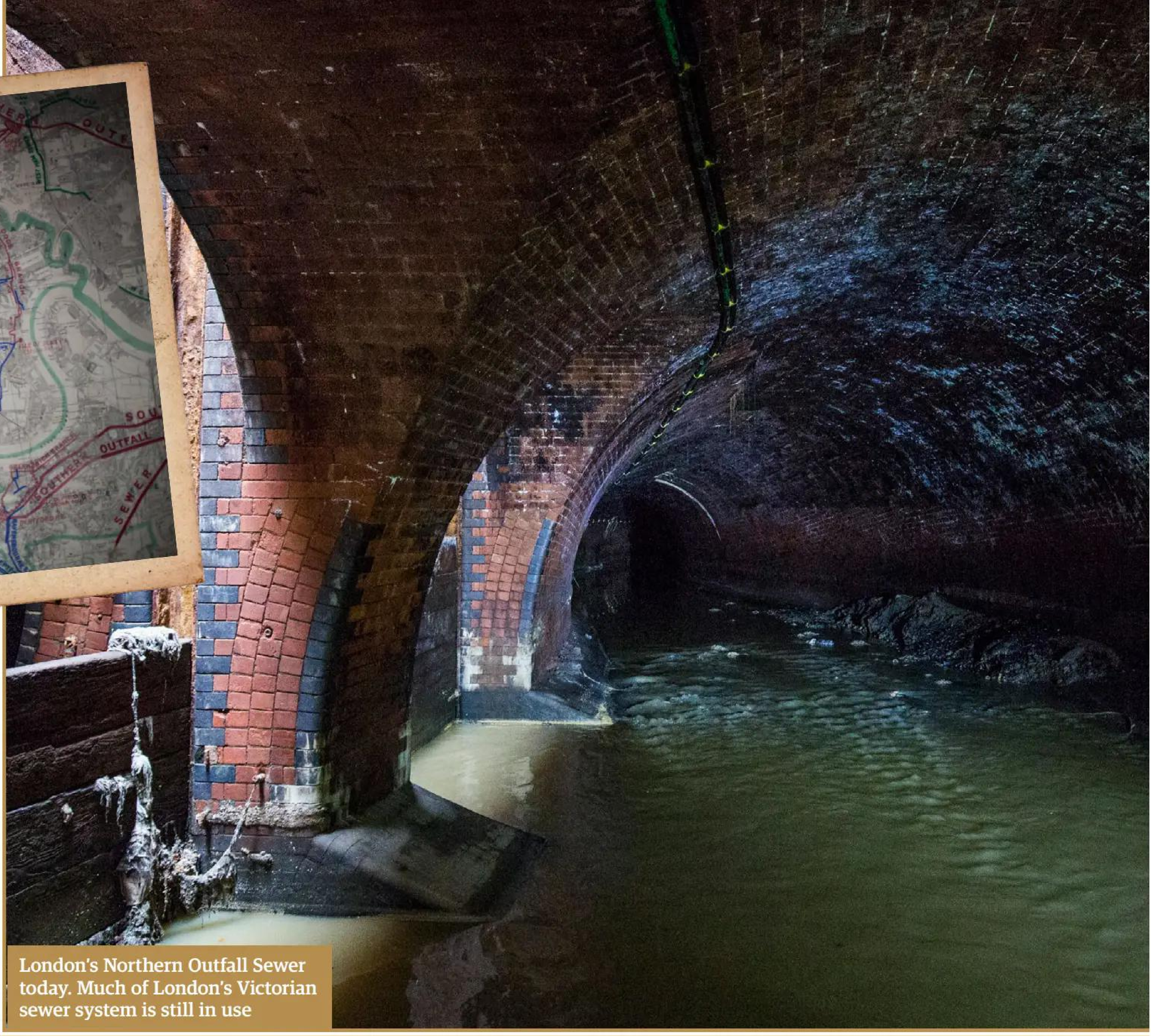
To be fair on the Victorians,

Coins and other artefacts that were lost over the years and found in the Northern Outfall Sewer

A portrait of Sir Joseph Bazalgette, who was knighted in 1874 for his pioneering sewerage system and contribution to public health

© Getty

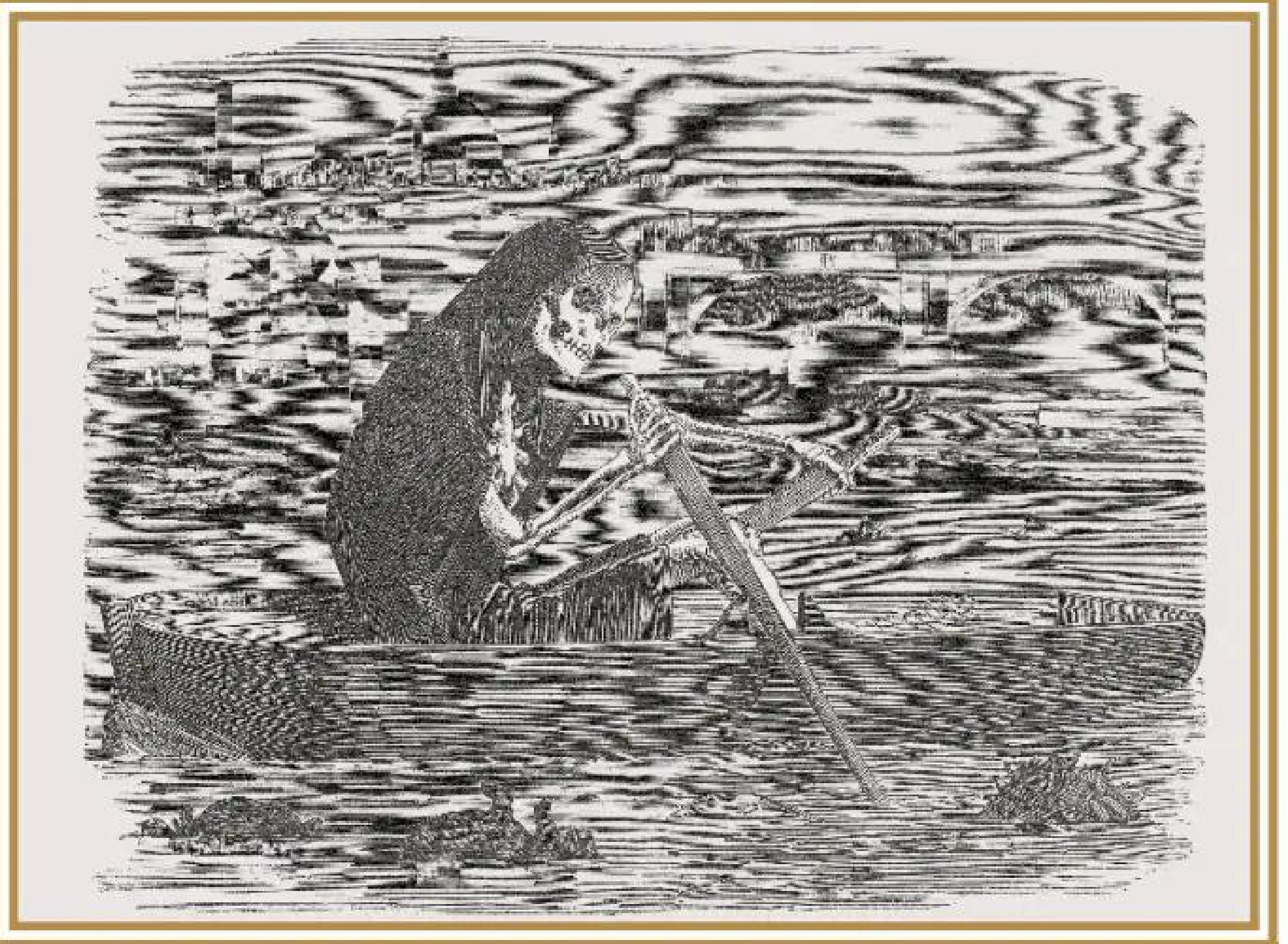

A map of the main, intercepting and storm relief sewer networks that were designed by Bazalgette

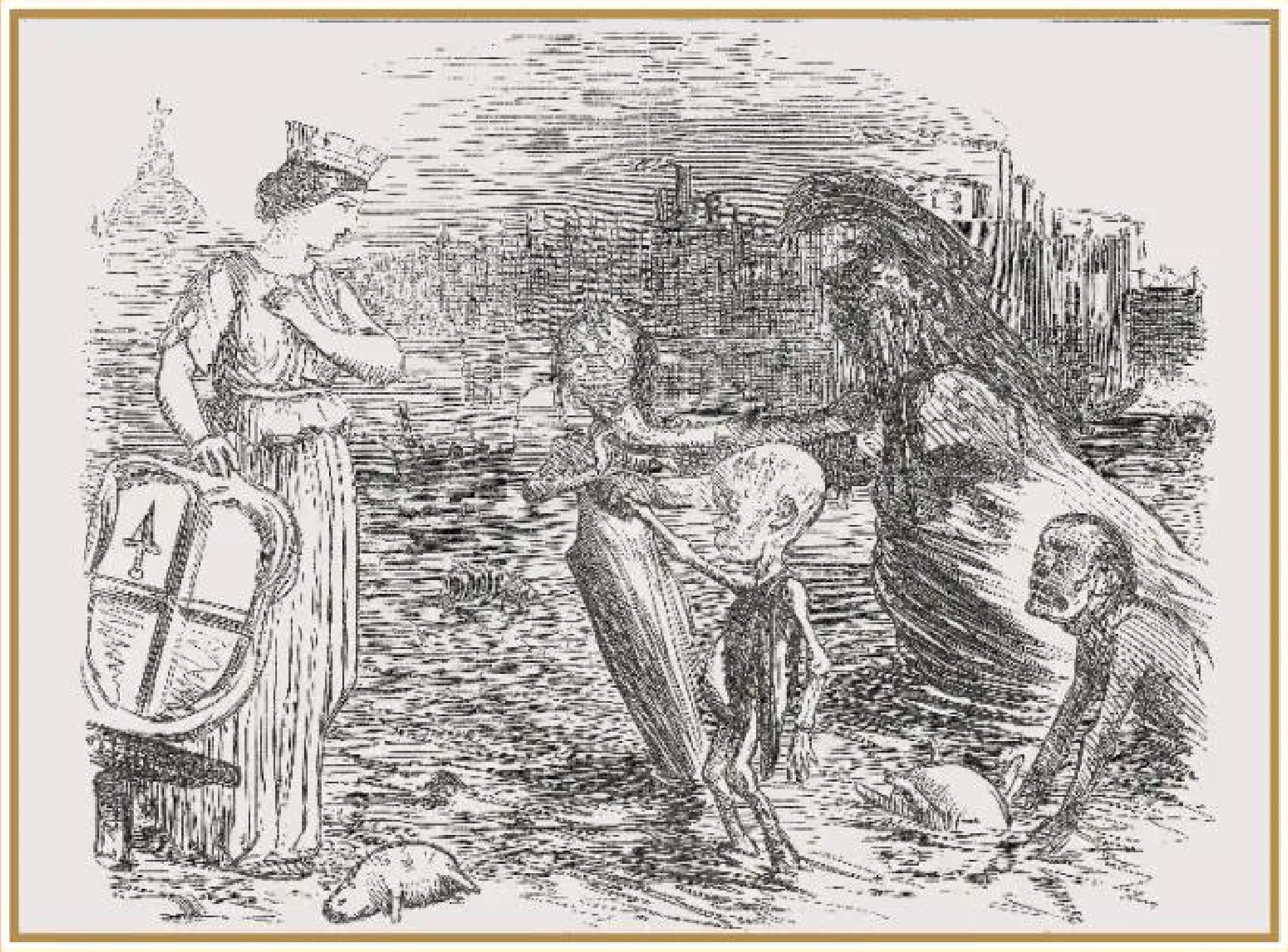

London's Northern Outfall Sewer today. Much of London's Victorian sewer system is still in use

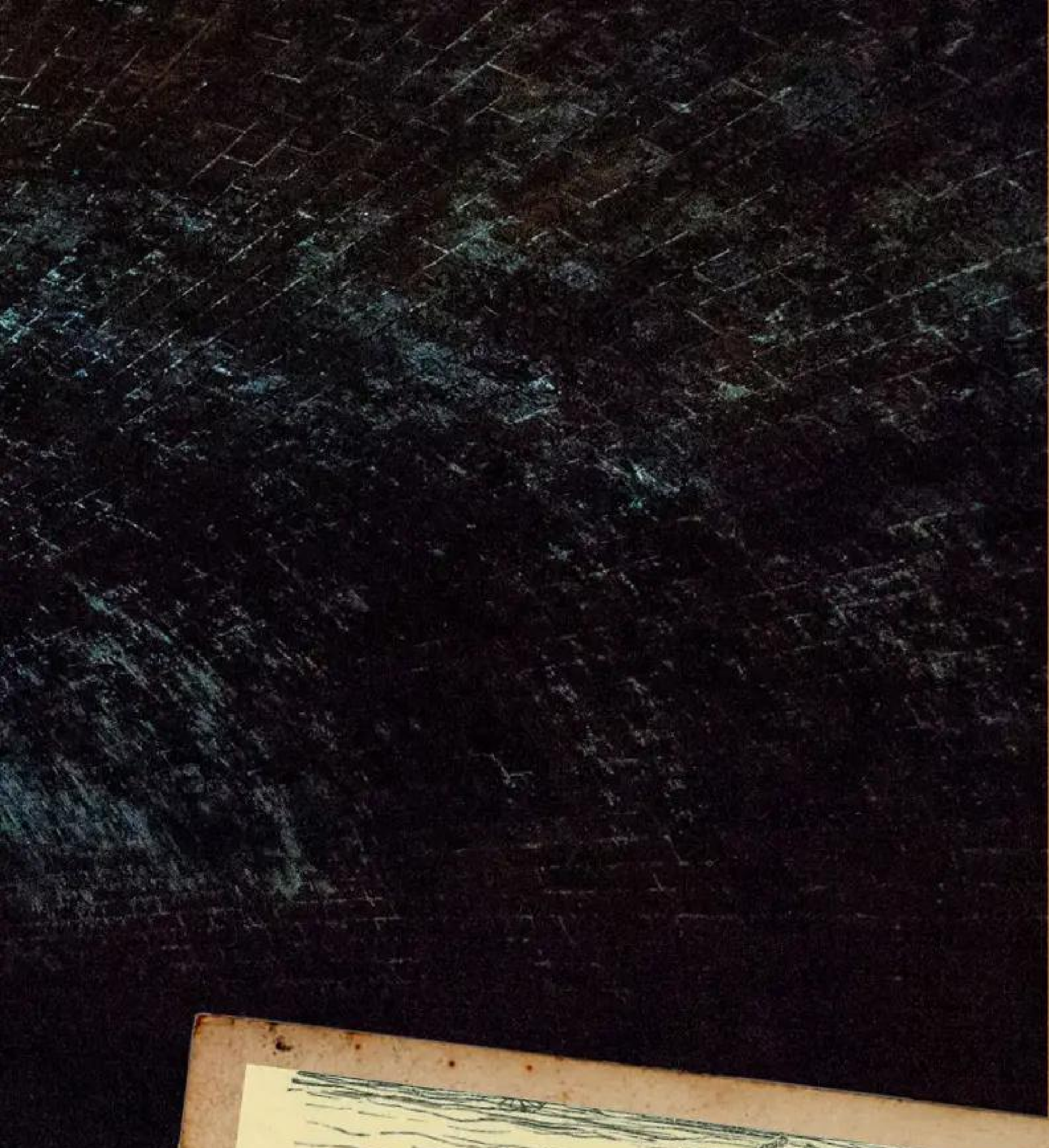
while they had further polluted the Thames with their new-fangled flushing toilets that deluged the old and decaying sewer system, a population that had tripled in half a century, and the toxic waste byproducts of the Industrial Revolution, this was a problem that had been handed down over the preceding 500 years. Prior to the mid-13th century, Londoners had taken water for drinking and washing either from pumps or wells that tapped into aquifers underground, or directly from the freshwater tributaries that fed into the Thames – such as the Fleet river that now runs through a sewer channel beneath London's famous Fleet Street. But the water was dirty and people complained, prompting the local government to built London's first ever water system – the 'Great Conduit'. This was a pipeline nearly three miles long that carried fresh water from a spring in the countryside into the city. It was made of hollowed-out logs and lead pipes and although some of this was replaced over the years, by the 19th century the antiquated water supply network was regularly being tainted by the leaky and overburdened sewage overflow system. Particularly the Fleet, which emptied into the Thames and was near-constantly overflowing with "sweepings from butchers stalls, dung, guts and blood" that came "tumbling down the flood," according to Jonathan Swift's 1810 poem *A Description of a City Shower*.

> "By the 19th century London's antiquated water supply network was regularly being tainted by the leaky and overburdened sewage overflow system"

By the 1850s, the Thames was indeed nothing more than a vast, open sewer. The smell was so bad that popular anecdotes talk of dock workers vomiting over the sides of jetties and a suicidal woman passing out before she could throw herself into the depths. Notwithstanding the Victorian penchant for gossip and exaggeration, it was vile enough for the authorities to dump 200 tons of caustic lime into the water to disinfect and quell the overwhelming stench, which was especially rank in warmer weather. The tipping point came in the summer of 1858, when an unusually hot July baked human waste to the shoreline and turned an already reeking river into a stygian stew of sluggish filth so foul-smelling that MPs had to flee the Houses of Parliament mid-session, handkerchiefs pressed to their mouths. The politicians weren't just trying to escape with their stomach contents intact: the Victorians had a medieval understanding of disease and how it propagated. The common misconception was that this awful 'miasma' caused the cholera epidemics of previous decades in which tens of thousands of Londoners had died – despite doctor John Snow's 1849 paper proposing that the disease was water-borne. So prime minister Benjamin Disraeli and his colleagues literally thought they were running from the building for their lives. However, there was an upside to this – now that the most powerful men in the country felt personally threatened by the mere whiff of pollution from the Thames, its cleanup became the highest priority in the land. Legislation was pushed through on 15 July 1858 and a sum of £3 million (over £100 million today) was committed to solving this problem. But how?


Another *Punch* cartoon that satires the polluted state of the Thames, this one published in 1858 days before prime minister Disraeli issue a bill to clean the river up


This cartoon depicts Father Thames introducing his children (Diptheria, Scrofula and Cholera) to a disgusted London, represented like Britannia as a goddess

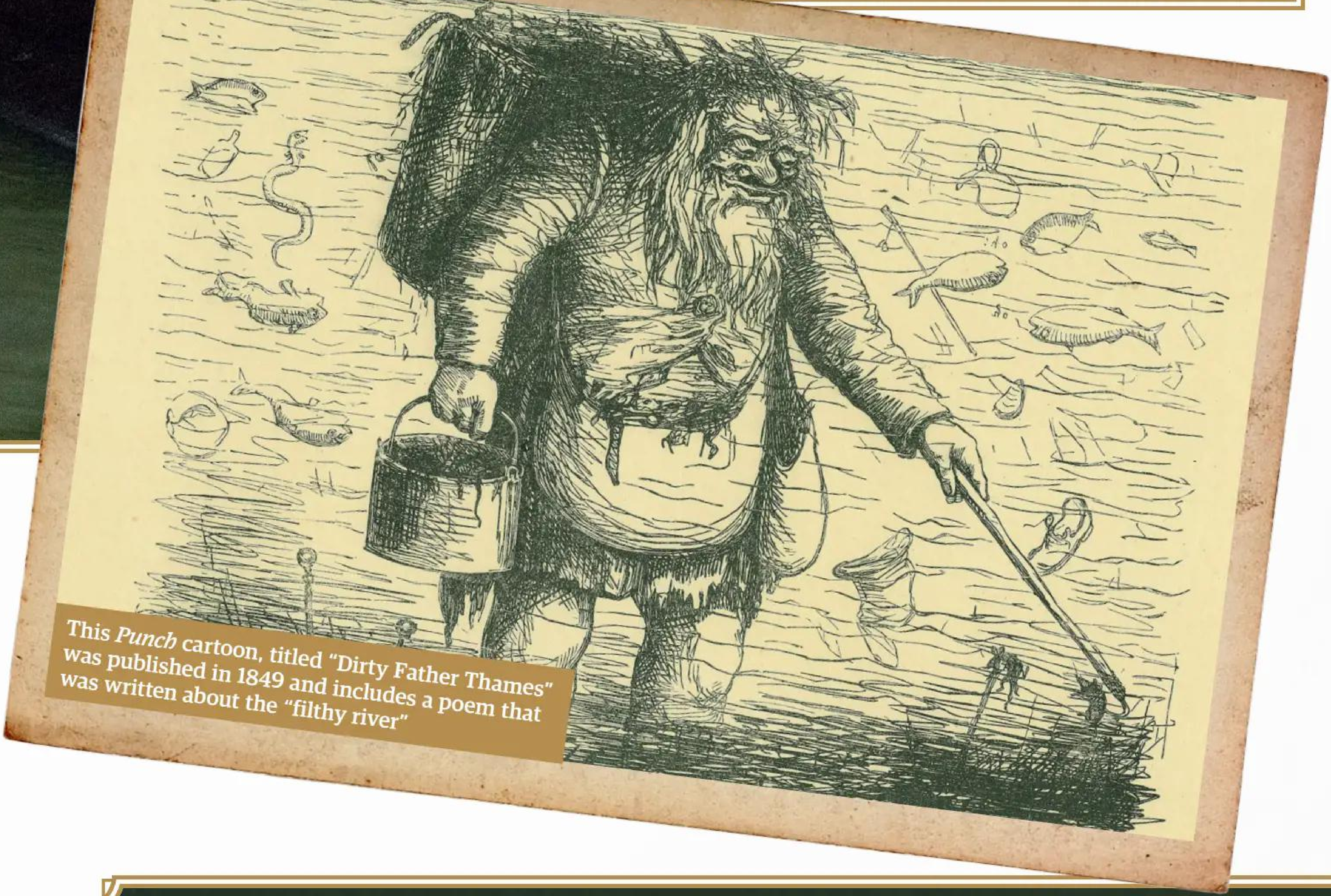


Thames Water cleaning teams inspects the Victorian brickwork of the Fleet river's storm sewer, that runs under central London

Enter Joseph Bazalgette, a young surveyor with a reputation as a workaholic who had quickly risen to the position of chief engineer of the recently established Metropolitan Commission of Sewers. For the best part of the 1850s, he had been working on a plan to build over a thousand miles of small street sewers that fed into nearly 100 miles of main sewers, with pumping stations and outfalls that discharged sewage to the east, farther downstream of the city. It was an ambitious, expensive and highly sophisticated feat of engineering rife with its own subsets of problems. Bazalgette had tried and failed, amended and failed to get his plan approved for the best part of the decade. It was only after a change in government and the Great Stink of 1858, that Bazalgette's 1856 proposal was finally rubber-stamped by government.

The works were completed over the next two decades and ran considerably over Bazalgette's initial estimated budget of £2.4 million. Despite the expense and time taken, his efforts were lauded in the press and parliament as the 'miasma' cleared from the Thames. London's last cholera outbreak occurred in 1866, which only vindicated Bazalgette's work as almost all of the 5,596 people who died lived in an area that hadn't been connected to the new sewer network. Most of this is still being used today, supporting more than twice the population of Bazalgette's upper estimate - quite the testament to the engineer's vision. Some of the pumping stations have even become listed buildings. And to this day, there has been no repeat of the Great Stink of 1858.

© Getty; Alamy

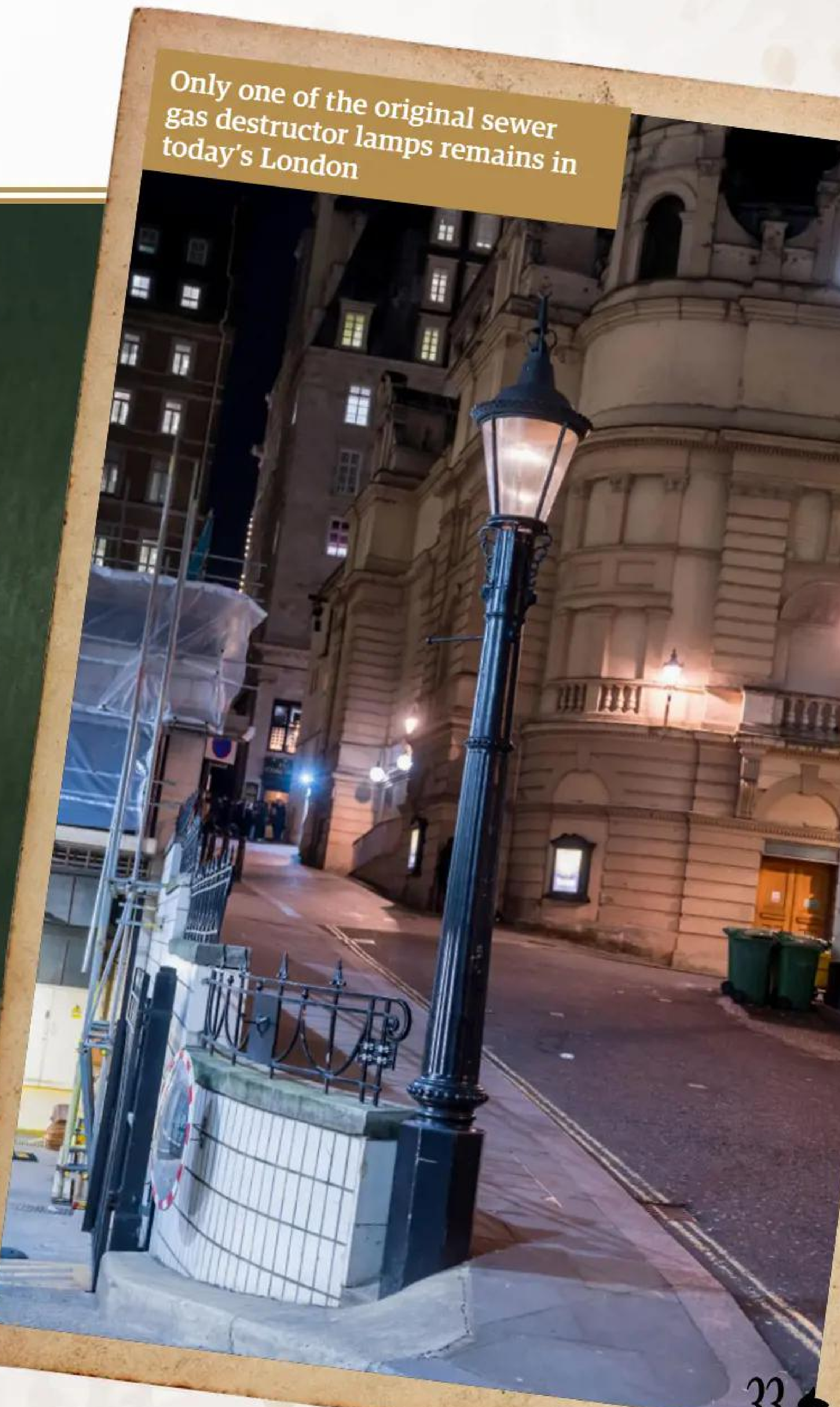


This *Punch* cartoon, titled "Dirty Father Thames" was published in 1849 and includes a poem that was written about the "filthy river"

Farting Lane's sewer gas lamp

How one engineer worked out how to vent off dangerous sewer gases while providing the iconic lamplight of Victorian London

Building a complex sewer network beneath the streets of London might have solved one problem, but also it created another. In the poorly ventilated tunnels, biogases built up as a result of anaerobic digestion. Carbon dioxide and hydrogen sulphide are deadly in high concentrations, but by far the biggest threat to Bazalgette's freshly minted feat of engineering was methane: large volumes of this gas can explode with little more than a static electric spark. The problem was more pronounced on hills, where the methane would rise from the tunnels below. The most obvious solution was to drill holes into the sewer at key stagnation points and vent the gases into the street, dispersing the gases above the heads of pedestrians – although, a change in the wind could still stink the street out. It took the brainchild of another engineer, Joseph Edmund Webb, to completely solve this problem. Webb invented the "sewer gas destructor lamp", a street lamp that drew the biogases up from the sewer and burnt them off with a flame, destroying the explosive and smelly gases while lighting the street at the same time. There wasn't enough sewer gas to maintain a constant flame alone, so the sewer gas lamps relied on standard street lamp gas to keep it burning. But installed at the tops of hills, these lamps could safely vent three quarters of a mile of sewer. These lamps eventually fell into disuse as vents were installed at the tops of buildings and today, only one sewer gas destructor lamp remains in London: a replica on Carting Lane, which is affectionately known as "Farting Lane".



Only one of the original sewer gas destructor lamps remains in today's London

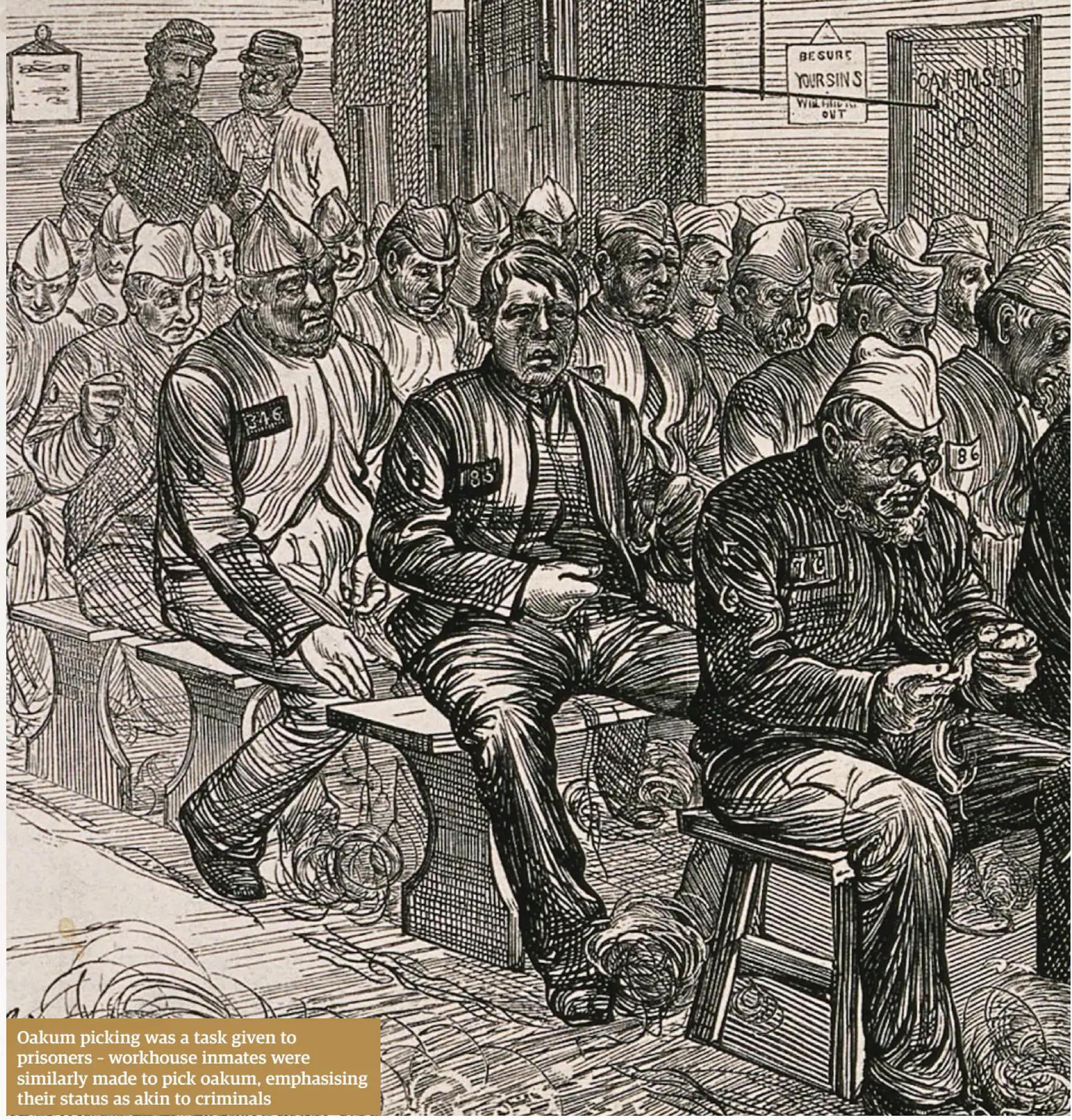
All WORK and

NO PAY

© Alamy

A workhouse was more of a prison for the poor than a refuge – but how were workhouse inmates punished?

Words by Nell Darby


BE SURE YOUR SINS WILL FIND YOU OUT
OAKUM SHED
346
185
76
186

Oakum picking was a task given to prisoners - workhouse inmates were similarly made to pick oakum, emphasising their status as akin to criminals

People have always been poor. Agricultural depressions and other factors have, at times, resulted in unemployment, poverty and destitution for those at the bottom of the social classes. Throughout British history, those in charge have had to find money to help those in poverty - but they have also had to decide who deserves help, and who doesn't. Poverty has often been viewed as a crime - something to be punished.

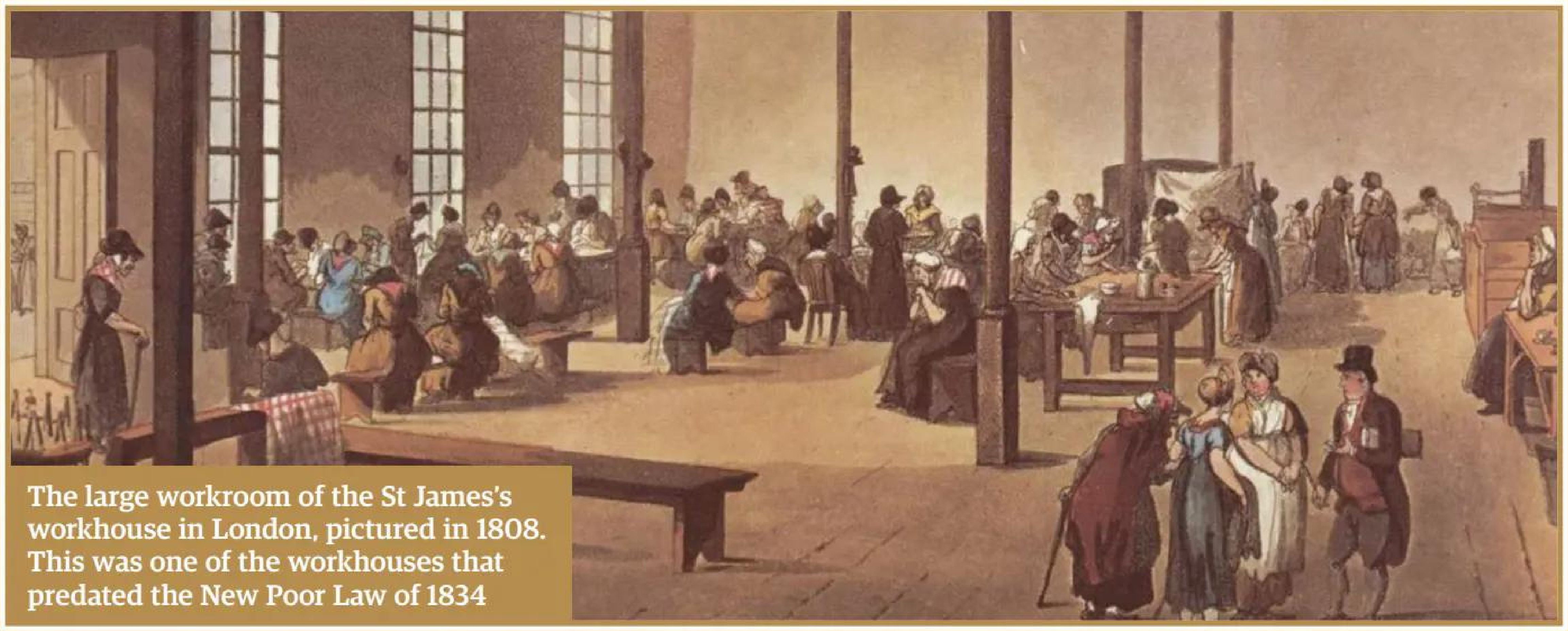
In Tudor times, there became a distinction between those who were unemployed through unavoidable factors and those who were seen as 'idle' - the undeserving poor. But how could anyone who was destitute be helped, and who should help them? The 1601 Poor Relief Act in England and Wales established workhouses, where 'idlers' would be punished. Those who were not deemed to be 'idlers' would either be offered outdoor relief (such as money or food given while they remained in their own homes) or housed in the workhouse. These early workhouses were generally small, badly organised, and within local parishes. Scotland, which had passed its own Poor Law Act in 1579, relied more on outdoor relief, but by the 18th century, major Scottish cities had poorhouses.

However, the problem of what to do with paupers became increasingly urgent in the early 19th century as industrialisation gathered pace. Political economist Thomas Malthus and philosopher Jeremy Bentham saw the workhouse as the solution to a growing population and a working class increasingly interested in their leisure time rather than in work. Resources became tighter as populations - particularly in urban areas - increased, and it was expected that people should either work for a living or be locked up in the workhouse and made to work there, rather than remain 'idle' and underworked outside.

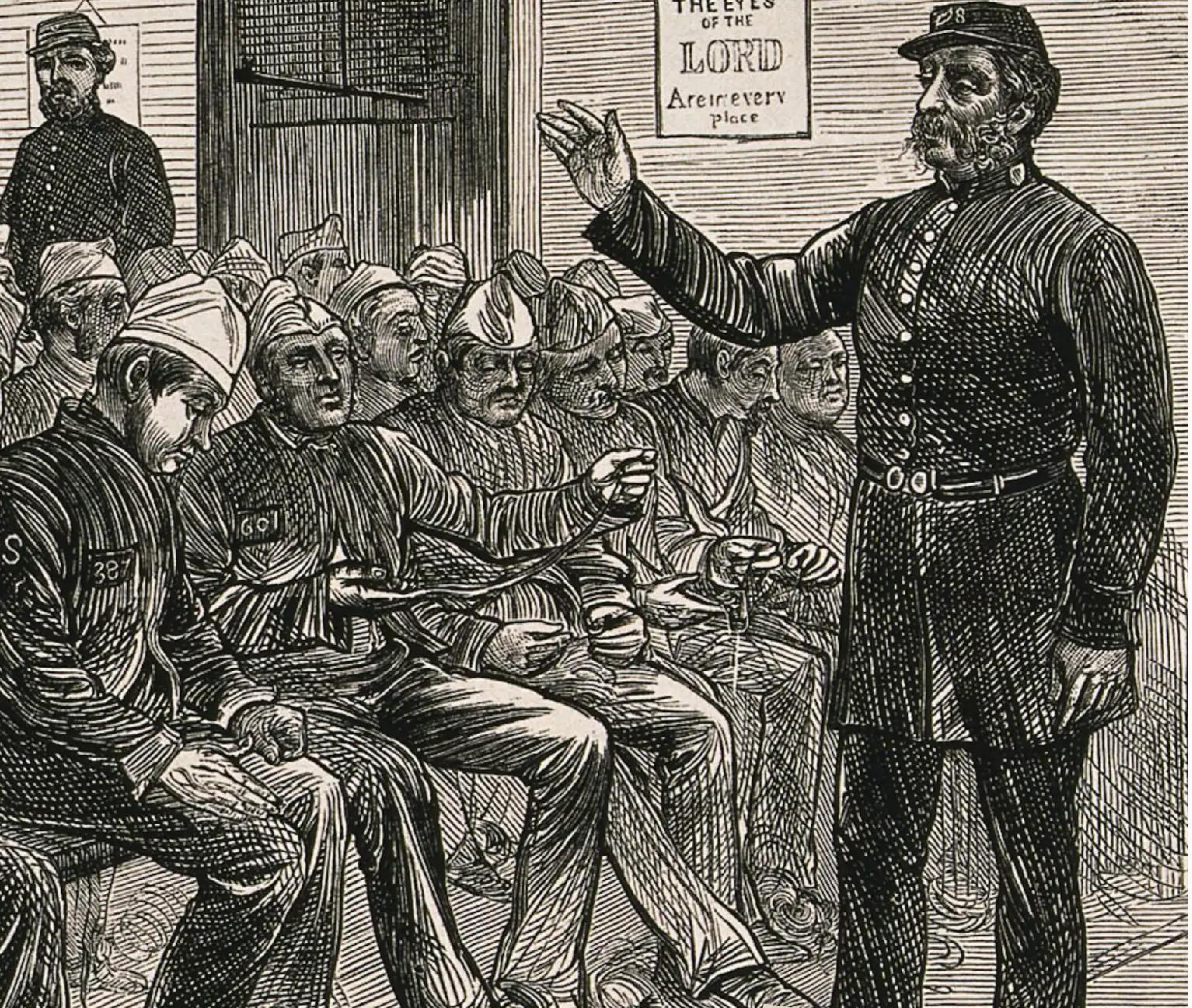
By the 1830s, the system was seen as about to collapse due to cost and the number of poor. The end of the Napoleonic Wars led to an economic depression and increased unemployment. There was a series of bad harvests, affecting large numbers of agricultural workers in rural areas, and this also led to more people seeking help. In 1834, the New Poor Law was passed. This discouraged outdoor relief to the 'idlers' - the workhouse would now be the only option for them. Workhouses would also be more organised and no longer be run by individual parishes, but by Poor Law Unions. By 1840, hundreds of new workhouses had been built. In Scotland, the 1845 Poor Law Act established parochial boards to raise and allocate money and allowed parishes to combine to run 'combination poorhouses', although most paupers continued to receive outdoor relief. In charge was a workhouse master, aided by a matron - many were married couples. There would be a medical officer, a chaplain, a porter, and a teacher. In workhouses such as at Southwell in Nottinghamshire, the master's quarters were in the heart of the building, to enable him to be able to watch over the inmates as they exercised.

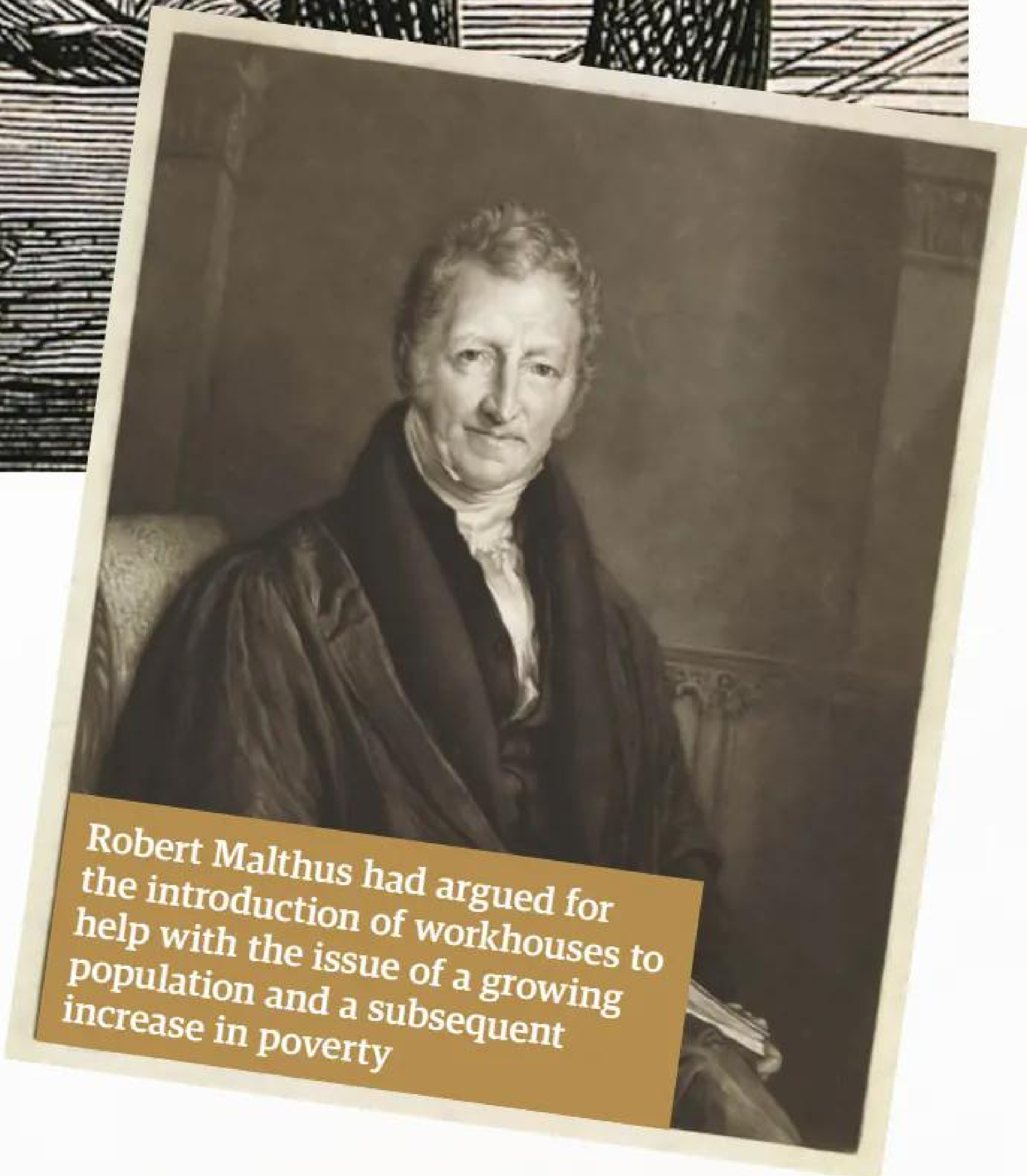
The new workhouses were designed to make the inhabitants feel like prisoners - that they were bad for being poor. They were built with work and exercise yards, set behind walls, and inmates were segregated. The old and infirm, children, able-bodied men and able-bodied women were all housed separately, meaning that families could be broken up. Even the work and exercise yards were segregated for each category of inmate. Although it was argued that people needed to be split up in order to prevent illness, it also had a psychological effect on individuals, which it was hoped would deter them from continuing their pauperism - as though it was a choice.

There was a set pattern to people's admittance to the workhouse. They could apply for help, and be visited by the Poor Law Union's relieving officer, who would visit them to assess if they needed outdoor relief or a note admitting them to the workhouse. Alternatively, some people - those tramping the country, or vagrants - might visit a workhouse themselves to seek admission to the casual ward. This is where they could stay a night before continuing their journey elsewhere. The casual ward, with its basic bedding, was designed to be as unwelcoming as possible, to discourage the indigent poor from staying; and whether or not



The large workroom of the St James's workhouse in London, pictured in 1808. This was one of the workhouses that predated the New Poor Law of 1834


THE EYES OF THE LORD Are in every place


Robert Malthus had argued for the introduction of workhouses to help with the issue of a growing population and a subsequent increase in poverty

they were even given a bed for the night depended on the workhouse porter, who would greet them at the door and assess them.

Others would come through the entrance and be assessed in a reception room – the assessment included a check for disease. They would then be separated and sent to a ward. Individuals were separated into age categories for each gender. All items of personal clothing would be removed from a pauper when they entered the workhouse, when they would be washed and given a workhouse uniform. These varied from place to place, but usually consisted of a shirt, jacket, trousers and cap for men, and a striped dress and smock for women. A pauper's own clothes would be stored for them, and returned when they left the workhouse. Those admitted to the casual ward would be allowed to keep their own clothes on, as they were not expected to stay at the workhouse for any length of time. All new paupers would also be searched – the workhouse master would search male paupers, with the matron searching women and children. Any alcohol, 'improper' letters or texts, cards, dice, and matches would be taken away, together with any food that was not included within the workhouse diet.

If you were in the workhouse, you were expected to work unless physically unable to. Some might be asked to look after the children, or help teach them, but at least these were useful jobs. Others were more pointless. Paupers might be ordered to break stones, or pick oakum. Some would be told to dig holes, which were then filled in again ready to be dug up on a useless repeat mission. They might have to remove hemp from telegraph wires, or crush bones that would be used to create fertiliser. This last job had been controversial since the early days of the New Poor Law, but was seen by some as a valuable tool to

> "The new workhouses were designed to make the inhabitants feel like prisoners"

The match girls

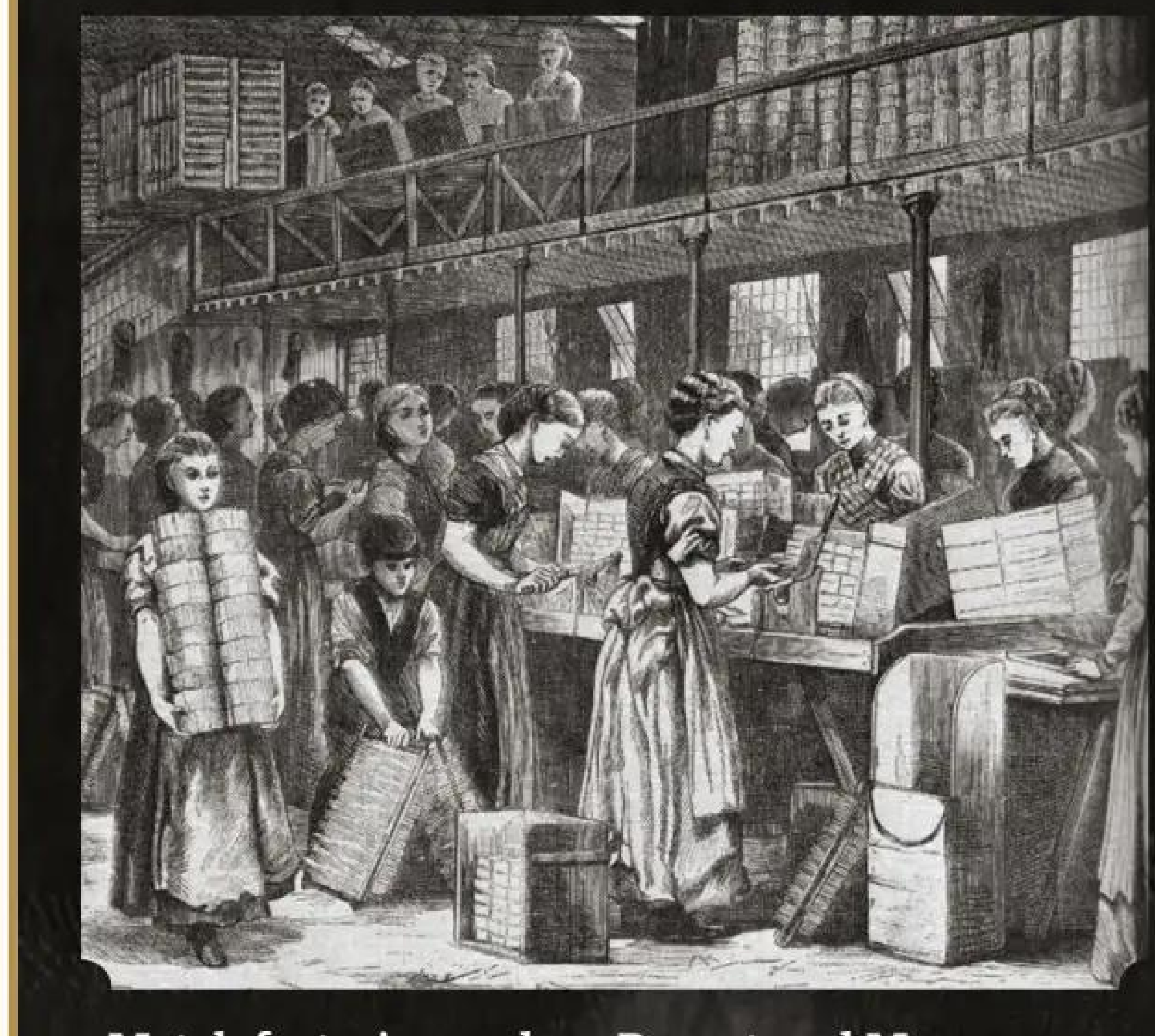
There was a fine line between precarious work and the workhouse. Could strikes help improve the situation?

Even when the poor had jobs, which kept them out of the workhouse, life could be difficult. Those living in London's East End in the late 19th century undertook work with long hours and little food or money – including the women and girls who worked in the Bryant and May factory in Bow.

These women and girls, who worked 14-hour shifts from the age of 13, had to stand all day, take minimum breaks, and work with dangerous phosphorus, which could cause the disfiguring condition known as 'phossy jaw' – a necrosis of the jaw. The women were fined for being untidy or talking, and had to buy their own supplies. There was no health and safety, and injuries resulted from operating machinery. Meanwhile, the factory owners made a lot of money from their labour.

Matters came to a head in the summer of 1888. A newspaper published a report into working conditions at Bryant and May, and managers tried to get the workers to deny the claims. Many refused to sign, and when one of them was sacked, the workers revolted. There was soon a strike involving 1,500 workers, many of whom paraded through the streets, arguing for better pay and working conditions.

The factory bosses were embarrassed by the bad publicity, and surprised by the level of public support for their employees. They duly changed the factory's pay and conditions. However, it would take another 20 years for phosphorous to be banned in match production.


Match factories such as Bryant and May employed poor girls, who would be expected to work long hours for little pay

© Getty; Source: Wikipedia Commons © Public Domain

Political activist Wordsworth Donisthorpe pondered the purpose of the workhouse in the late 19th century, noting that it served to stop (or at least delay) the poor from causing a revolution

deter people from entering the workhouse. In one workhouse, in the 1830s, two men had been ordered to crush bones. One immediately refused and left the workhouse the next day, preferring to try to find work breaking stones outside. The other found it so painful that he too left the workhouse within 24 hours. This was seen as demonstrating the success of the workhouse in deterring the poor from staying there.

However, in 1845, paupers in the Andover Workhouse in Hampshire started fighting over the bones they were crushing. The work - to produce bone meal fertiliser - was horrible: the smell was overpowering, and there were several men working in a small room. The bones were broken using large iron bars. The main problem was that the men undertaking this work were starving from their inadequate workhouse diet. The master of Andover Workhouse had given his inmates a diet that was more meagre than the rations that the Poor Law Commission had ordered - he was keeping the money he saved. In particular, he had failed to give those inmates who were sick the special diet they were ordered by medical staff. The rotting bones in front of Andover's inmates contained marrow and gristle, and several of the men were so hungry that they tried to gnaw the bones in order to get to the marrow. Their starvation caused a scandal and resulted in new orders on workhouse diet being issued. One of the men, labourer Charles Lewis, was later questioned, and he noted that some of his fellow inmates hid the bones away in order to ensure that they could feed from them later and not share them with others. He said that although he was extremely hungry, he was unable to keep down any of the marrow.

Life in the workhouse, as can be seen from the starvation rations of the Andover workhouse inmates, was based around reducing the cost of the poor to the ratepayer - although the individual greed of those involved in the workhouse system also played a part there. However, the workhouse diet was certainly seen as basic. William Morris used the term 'workhouse socialism' in 1890, to denote a system of degrading paupers by making them unfit to work and subject to a cheap diet. Workhouse socialism did not seek to change the situation whereby the poorest workers could easily become paupers. Its proponents recognised

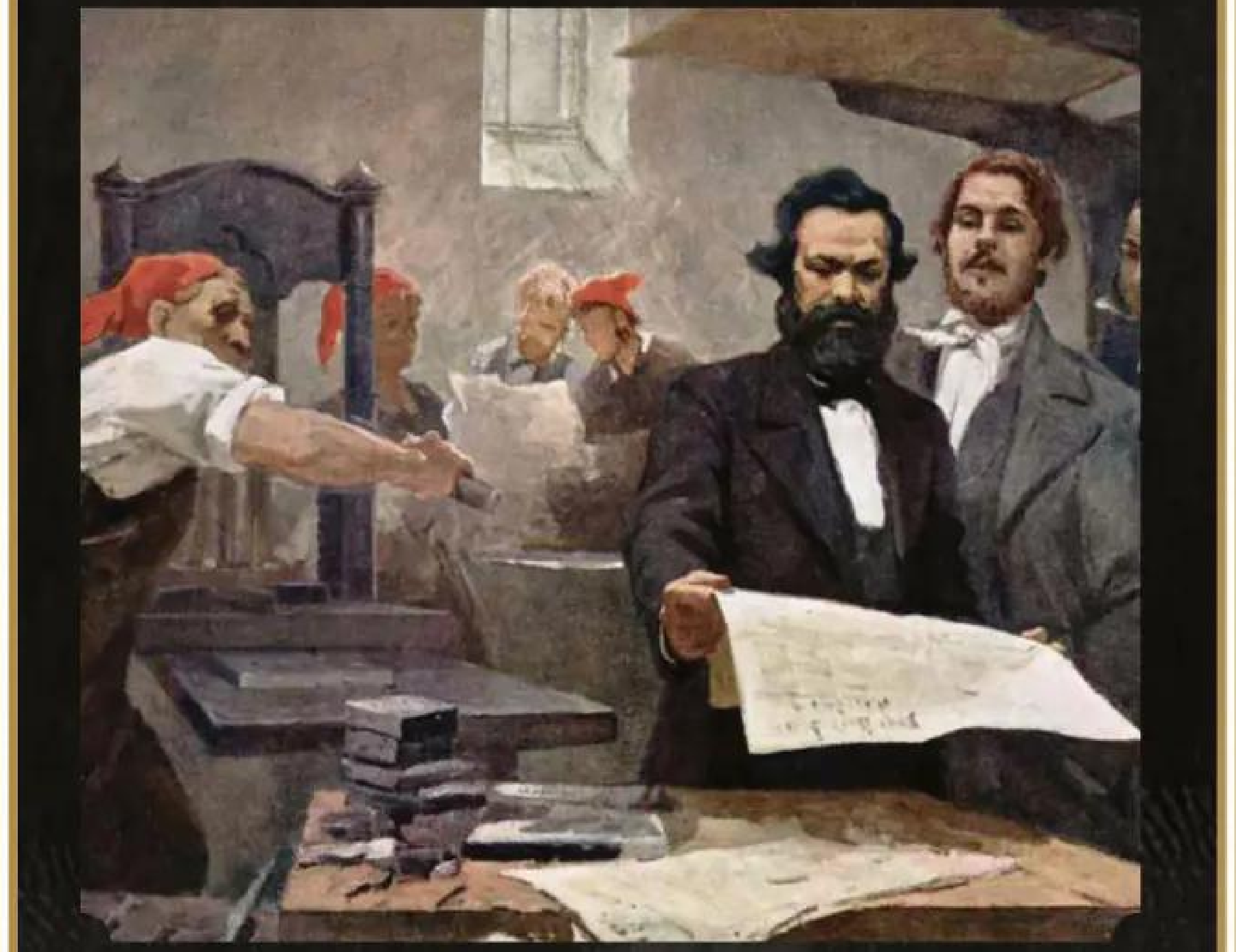
> "The rotting bones in front of Andover's inmates contained marrow and gristle, and several of the men were so hungry that they tried to gnaw the bones"

The working day

Karl Marx was appalled by the work set for workhouse inmates

In *Das Kapital*, Karl Marx pondered what a working day should be like. How long should a working day be? He realised that capitalists saw labourers as existing merely to make them money and that therefore, capitalists had little patience for education, socialising, or rest when it came to their workers. Just as the workhouse existed to make the poorest members of society work (even if on pointless tasks such as oakum picking), the factory existed as a 'workhouse for the industrial worker'. Both the factory and the workhouse were designed to terrorise the poor - to keep them working without the prospect of improvement.

Marx noted that the workhouse was a "House of Terror" where paupers were expected to work 14 hours a day. Similarly, the factory also made its workers undertake long shifts. The workhouse and the factory, in fact, both shut the poor up behind their doors to work and to suffer. Although factory workers were paid, the aim of capitalists, Marx argued, was to make them work more whilst driving down wages, ultimately making workers little more than slaves. The capitalists felt that if they gave a man a day off, he would become lazy. The poor laws separated the poverty-stricken into the categories of deserving and undeserving poor, with laziness punished. The factory pushed individuals to work harder and harder or risk losing their jobs. There was, therefore, little difference between the factory and the workhouse: both were the result of a capitalist society where the rich got richer, and the poor got poorer.



Karl Marx (pictured with his friend Friedrich Engels) saw similarities between working in a factory, and life in the workhouse

© Getty; Source: Wikipedia Commons © Public Domain

that the paupers were treated badly, but assumed that they could not help themselves and needed 'organising' or managing by those who were better off. In being managed by others, inmates of the workhouse were expected to display obedience. In reality, there were many instances of insubordination by both male and female residents, of escape attempts and the theft of workhouse clothing.

The workhouse was seen by some as a form of revolt against capitalism – for in the workhouse, the labourer received food and a bed, funded by the capitalist. However, in reality, the capitalist was the winner, for workhouse life was made so unpleasant that starvation was sometimes thought of as preferable. In his 1885 pamphlet *The Socialist Catechism*, James Leigh Joynes argued that there were two classes of men – the employers (the rich) and the employed (the poor). The employer – the capitalist – had allowed workhouses to be built because he knew that keeping the paupers fed and housed would stop them causing a revolution. Social reformer Wordsworth Donisthorpe, while critiquing aspects of Joynes' work, also recognised that this was the case; to prevent a revolution, you had to control those with the most to revolt against. These were those at the bottom of the social ladder, those people unable to work, to maintain their families. If they were desperate, they might cause social unrest, but when they were locked up in the workhouse, they were too busy with meaningless work and too weak from their meagre diets to be able to do so.

The Andover workhouse residents may have been infamous because of their shockingly poor diet, but elsewhere food was basic, to say the least. Because it needed to be cheap, the food supplied was limited and repetitive. In the mid-19th century, Ripon Workhouse in Yorkshire gave its male paupers seven ounces of bread with either porridge or cheese for both breakfast and supper; a typical lunch comprised five ounces of meat and 12 ounces of potatoes. Alternatively, inmates might receive bread and soup, a meat and potato pie, or rice pudding. Women received a smaller amount of food than men, as did children. However, if you were old, you might be allowed extra tea, sugar and butter.

Although some early workhouses allowed inmates vegetables – Shipston Workhouse in Warwickshire was offering potatoes or other vegetables several times a week by the late 1820s – it was not universal. As time went on, some workhouses grew their own vegetables in their gardens, and it was recognised that not only did the produce help keep people healthy, it also gave inmates work to do outdoors while also cutting down on how much their food cost. However, the workhouse diet was still somewhat monotonous.

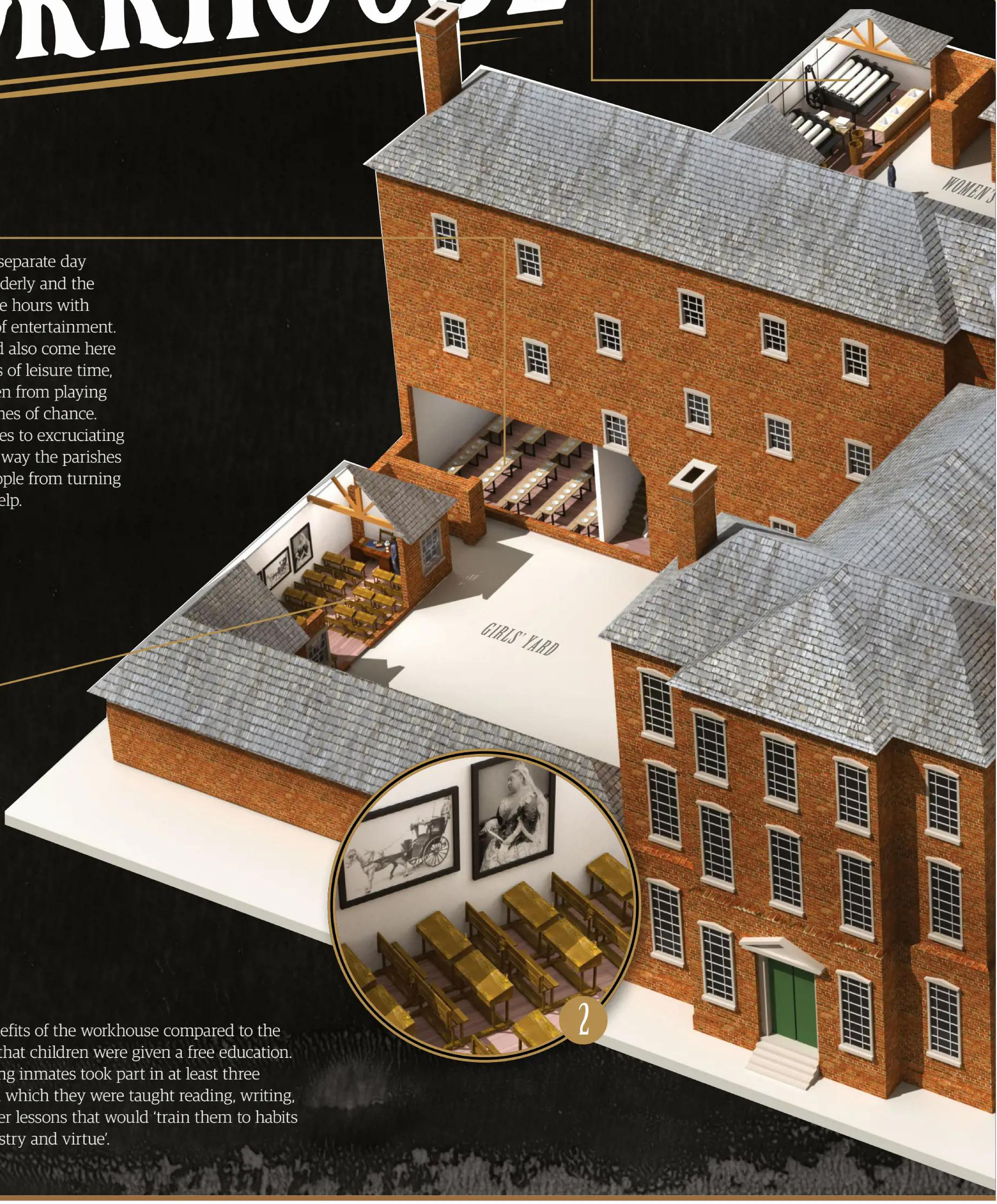
The only change to the diet came at Christmas, when a festive meal of roast meat and plum pudding might be provided. Food was a reward at Christmas, but at other times, it was withdrawn as a punishment. If a pauper was deemed to be disorderly, he or she could have their food decreased for up to 48 hours, receiving only eight ounces of bread or a pound of cooked potatoes each day. They might also have all butter, cheese, tea, sugar and broth withdrawn for the same amount of time. A pauper who swore, struck another person, refused to wash or work, pretended to be ill, or played cards, would be deemed as disorderly and punished.

This system of punishing the poor gradually changed to recognise the needs of those both poverty-stricken and ill. Workhouse infirmaries catered to both their inmates and to others, and by the Edwardian era, it was recognised that workhouses failed to adequately care for different categories of people. In 1918, a report recommended change, and in 1930, the workhouse system was finally abolished.

Children were housed separately to their parents in the workhouse – these children were in the Crumpsall Workhouse in Manchester. Although workhouse children were schooled, the standard of education they received varied

Female inmates having their dinner in the St Pancras Workhouse, London, in 1911. Orderliness and obedience were required in the workhouse

INSIDE THE WORKHOUSE



① Laundry

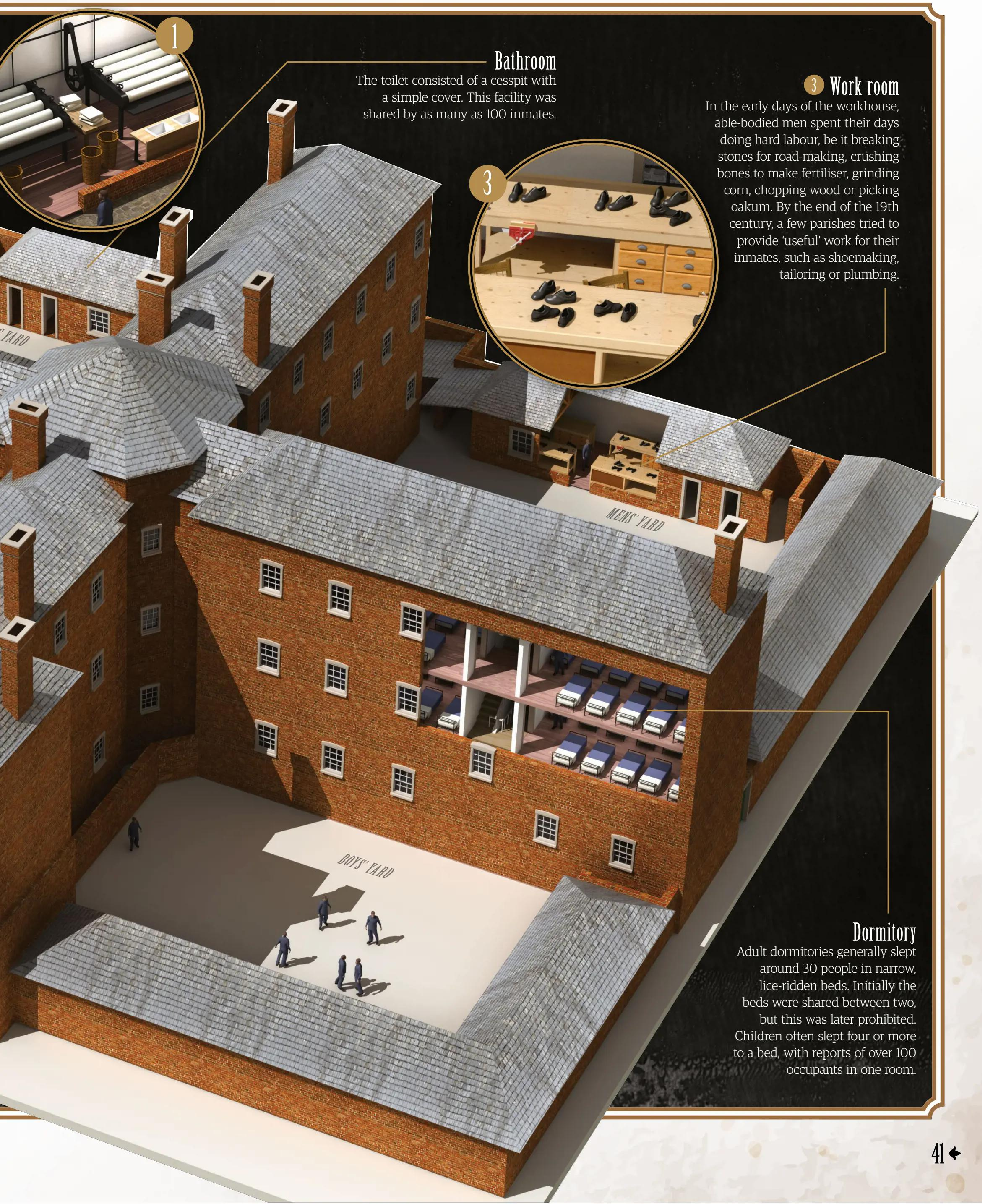
Female inmates mostly did domestic jobs like cleaning, gardening or helping in the kitchen or laundry room. Some workhouses had workshops for sewing, spinning and weaving in order to help local industry.

Day room

Men and women had separate day rooms, in which the elderly and the infirm whiled away the hours with very little in the way of entertainment. The able-bodied would also come here during their rare hours of leisure time, but they were forbidden from playing cards or any other games of chance. Subjecting their inmates to excruciating boredom was another way the parishes attempted to deter people from turning to the institution for help.

② Classroom

One of the few benefits of the workhouse compared to the outside world was that children were given a free education. Every day, the young inmates took part in at least three hours of lessons, in which they were taught reading, writing, arithmetic and other lessons that would 'train them to habits of usefulness, industry and virtue'.



Bathroom

The toilet consisted of a cesspit with a simple cover. This facility was shared by as many as 100 inmates.

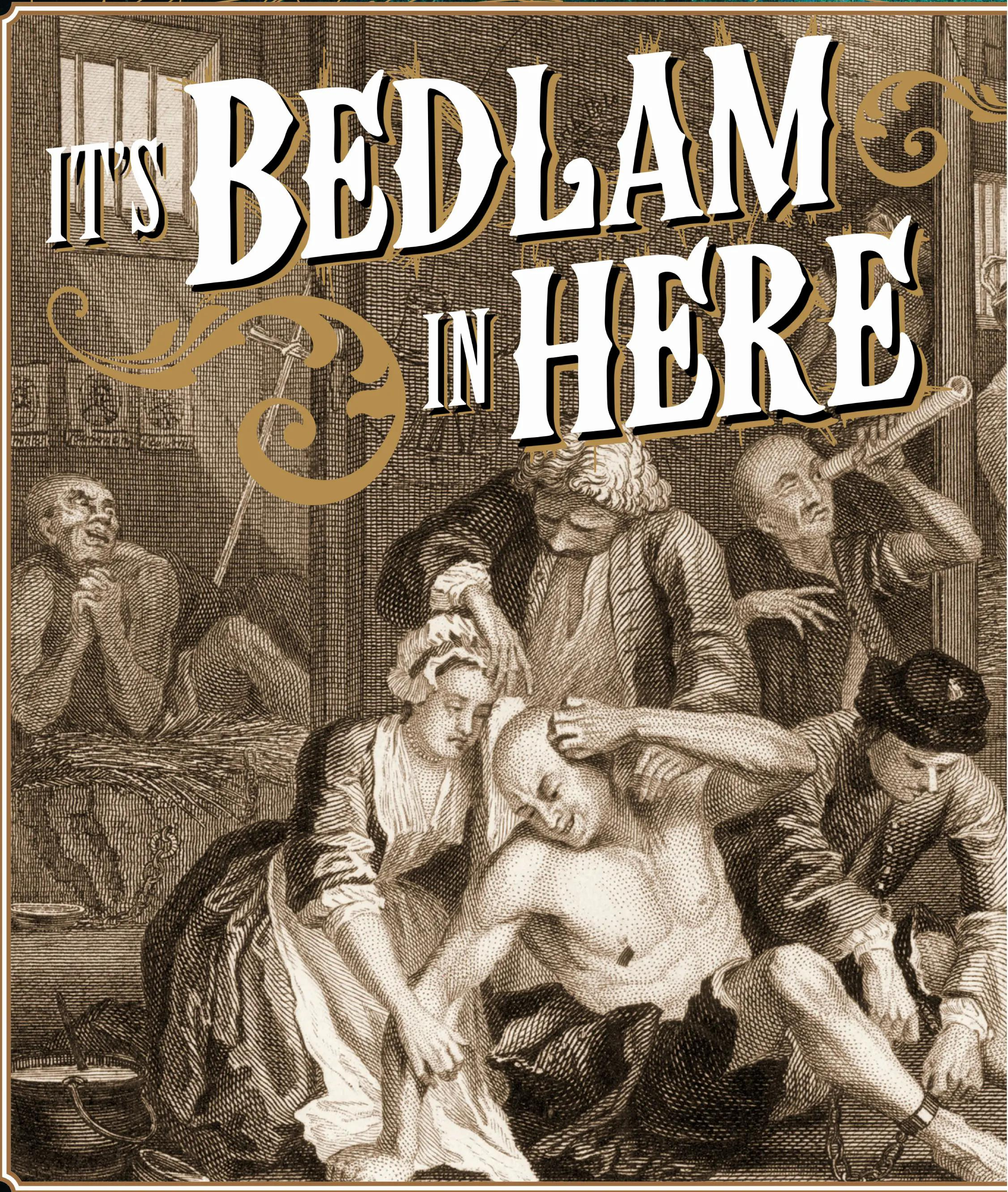
3 Work room

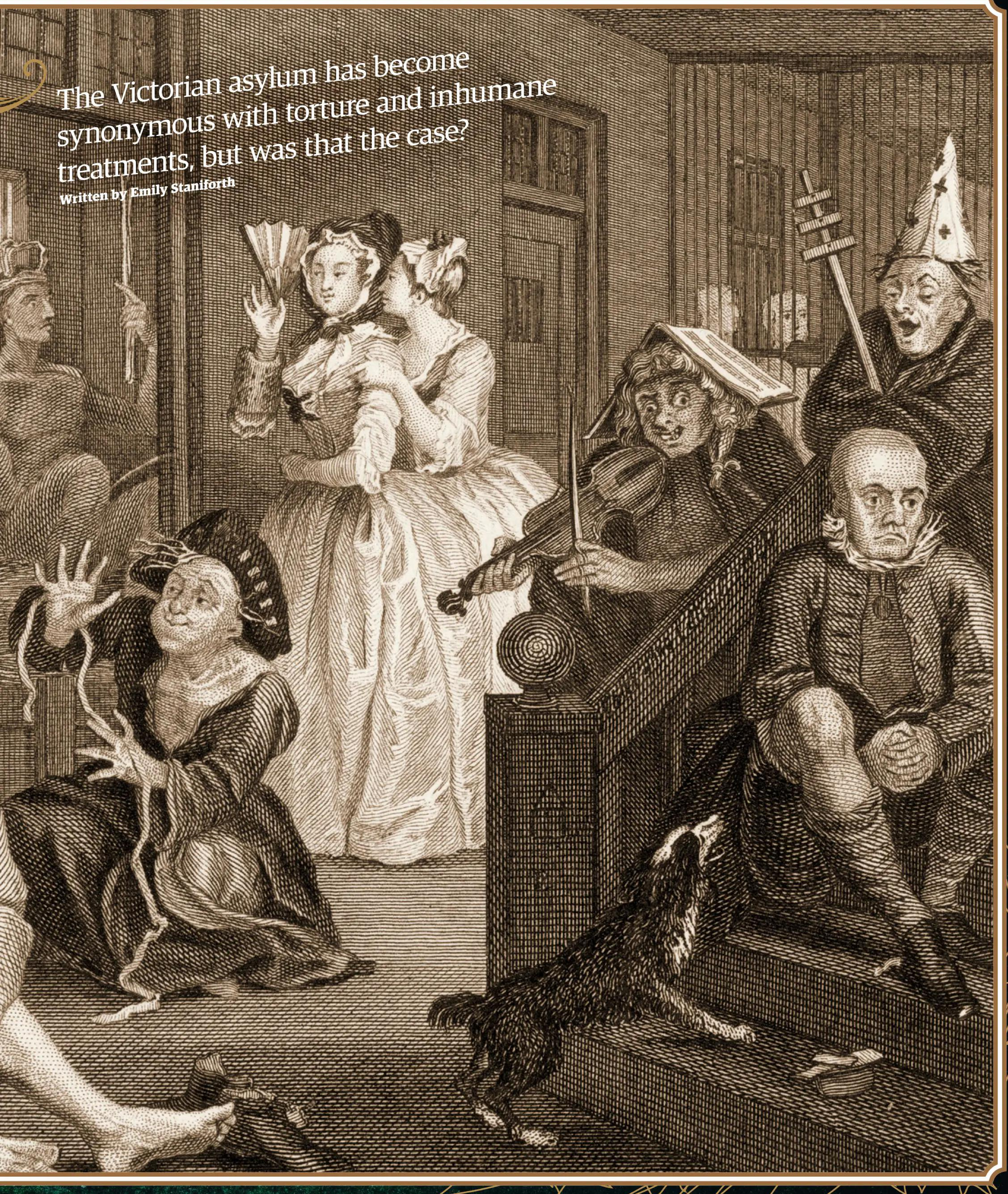
In the early days of the workhouse, able-bodied men spent their days doing hard labour, be it breaking stones for road-making, crushing bones to make fertiliser, grinding corn, chopping wood or picking oakum. By the end of the 19th century, a few parishes tried to provide 'useful' work for their inmates, such as shoemaking, tailoring or plumbing.

Dormitory

Adult dormitories generally slept around 30 people in narrow, lice-ridden beds. Initially the beds were shared between two, but this was later prohibited. Children often slept four or more to a bed, with reports of over 100 occupants in one room.

IT'S BEDLAM IN HERE





The Victorian asylum has become synonymous with torture and inhumane treatments, but was that the case?

Written by Emily Staniforth

A trip out in London in the 1600s could be peppered with all manner of entertaining activities. Perhaps a play, or a visit to the zoo. Or maybe stopping by London's most famous mental asylum to casually peruse and gawp at the mentally ill individuals who resided there. For many 'lunatics' at London's most infamous insane asylum, Bedlam, this was a reality of daily life. The ordeal of patients in Bedlam during this time was an awful one, with cold water therapy, physical abuse and enforced vomiting common treatments. Other institutions like Bedlam existed throughout Britain, with similar horrific methods of treating the mentally unwell. A couple of centuries later, the Victorians would seek to reform the way these establishments were run and to improve the care given to those they considered 'lunatics'.

Before the Victorians

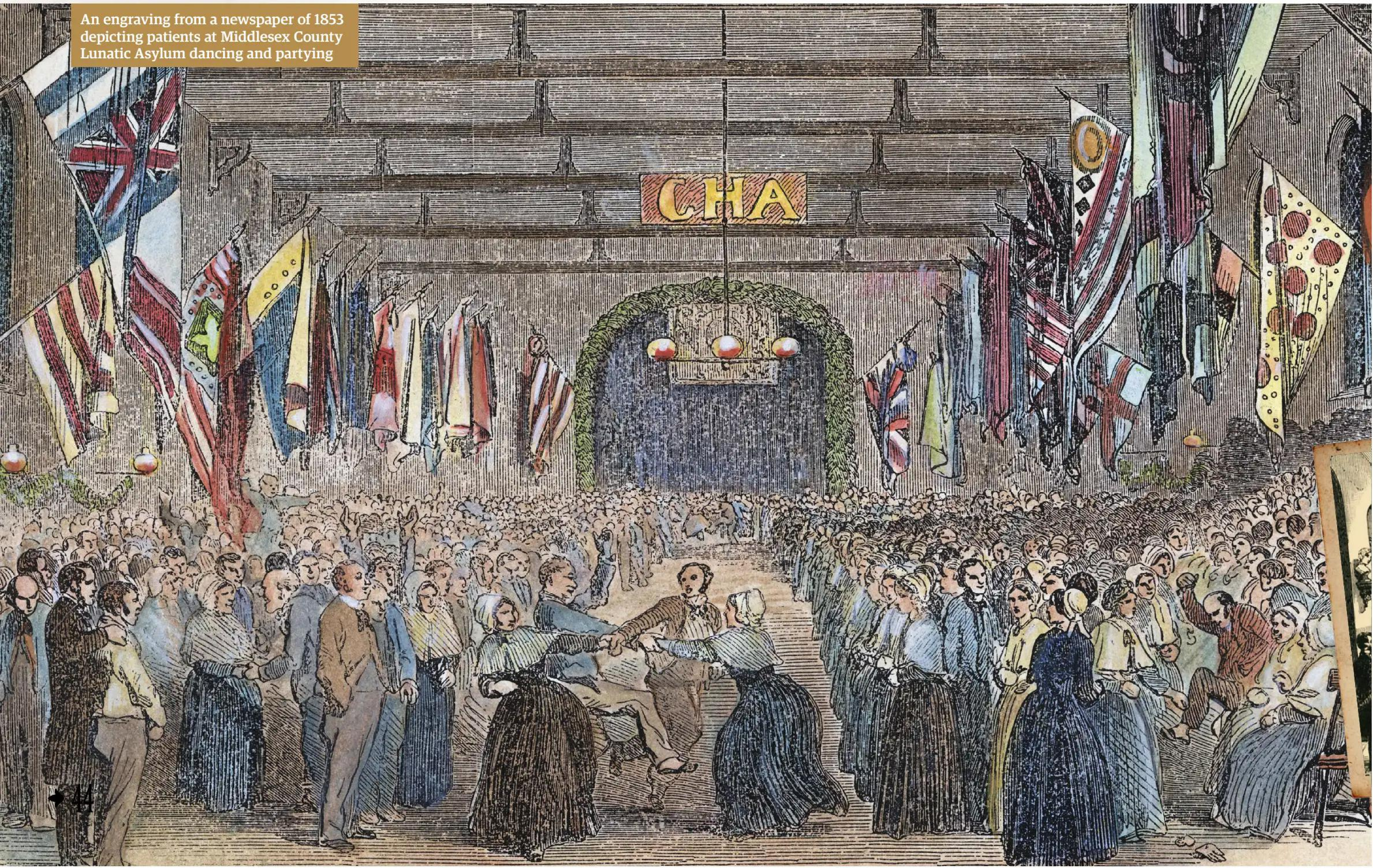
The concept of the 'asylum' as a place of residence for the mentally unwell (more likely to be referred to as 'insane' at the time) was first introduced in the Madhouses Act of 1774. However, for centuries before this, places of residence for 'lunatics' did exist. These institutions were unpleasant and unregulated and usually run by private individuals who were, in all likelihood, not licensed or trained in the treatment of the mentally ill.

Before the Madhouses Act, many people with poor mental health would have been cared for by a family member rather than in an institution of any kind. Unfortunately, this was not an option for those who came from poorer families, who had to work to survive and therefore could not care for them. Consequently, in these scenarios, the mentally unwell would have ended up in the workhouse. The workhouses were not easy places to live, particularly for those struggling with daily life outside of one. However, the inability to hold down a job in the wider world meant that more and more people with mental health problems, as well as people with learning disabilities, were finding themselves living in the workhouse. As a result, some workhouses separated their 'lunatic' residents and moved them onto different wards from the rest. The conditions in most workhouses were poor at best, and the staff who worked there had no idea how to look after those who could not sufficiently care for themselves.

The lack of care they got at the workhouse was probably preferable to the situation an ill person would find themselves in a pre-Victorian asylum, however. With little to no research into mental health treatment, many asylum patients were subjected to horrific acts of abuse and torture, in the name of medical therapy. Chains and restraints were a common sight within England's insane asylums, with residents' movement being physically restricted on a daily basis. The use of chains evolved from the custodial nature of the earliest asylums, which were often used as a way to detain those who were viewed as a problem within society, primarily because they did not behave in the way that they were expected to.

Patients in lunatic asylums were routinely chained to their beds or to the walls for a variety of reasons, which was viewed as not only acceptable but entirely necessary in providing care for them. Reasons for the use of restraints mainly revolved around the fact that they stopped residents from harming themselves or each other. Suicide of patients, of course, was a common problem facing those who ran the early asylums, as well as aggressive behaviour that could be associated with some mental health conditions.

Other horrific methods used in pre-Victorian asylums included bloodletting and cold water therapy, the latter of which was used to try and 'shock' the mental illness out of a patient. As well as being subjected to dubious and traumatising treatment, the asylums themselves were often in poor condition, meaning that residents lived in unhygienic conditions. Of course, with no regulation and with early asylums being run as private businesses, the methods of treatment and the conditions of the asylum varied from institution to institution. What we can say about asylums before the Victorian period, however, is that they were in desperate need of reform


An engraving from a newspaper of 1853 depicting patients at Middlesex County Lunatic Asylum dancing and partying

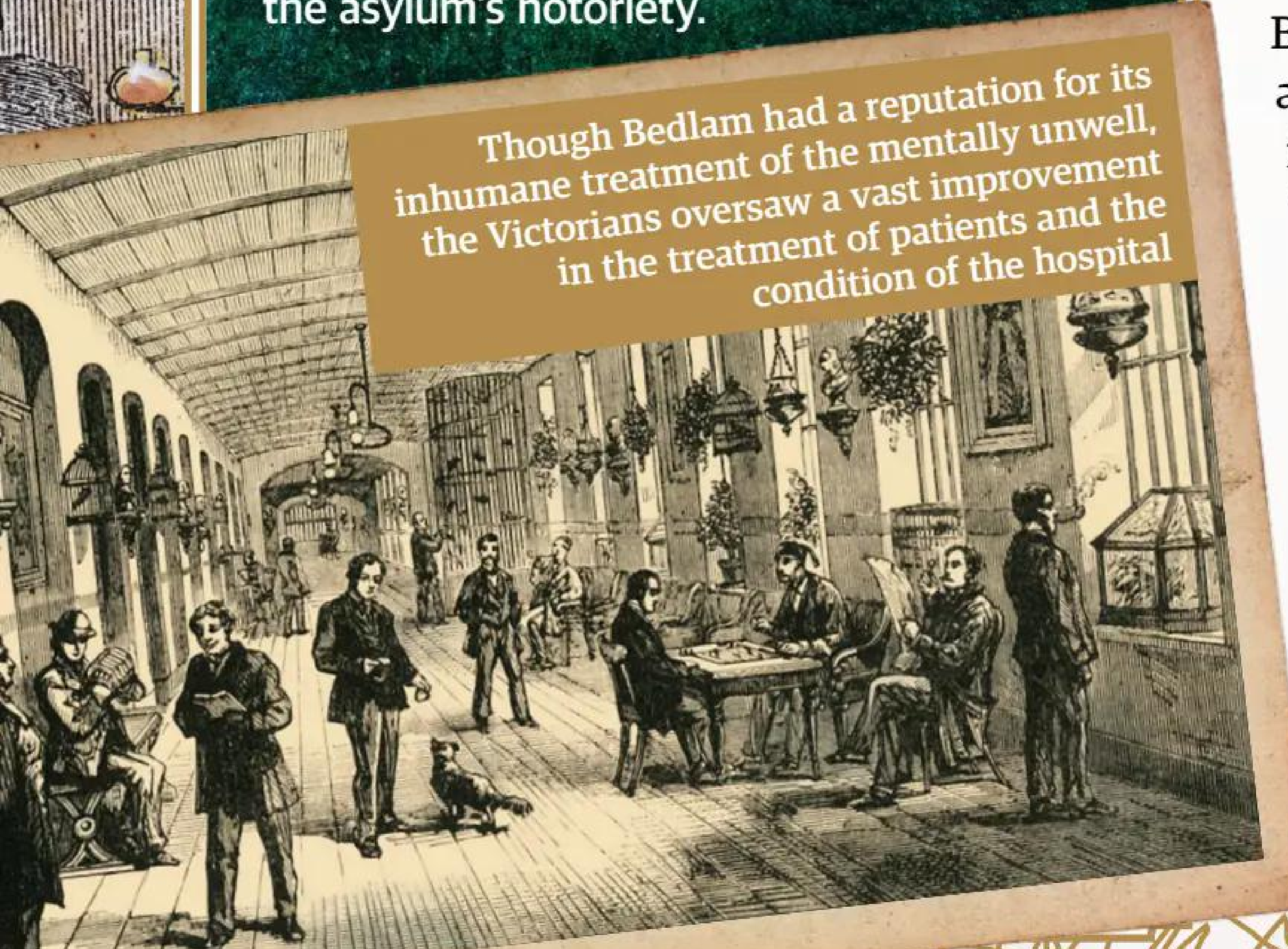
Bethlem Royal Hospital

How did Bedlam become so notorious?

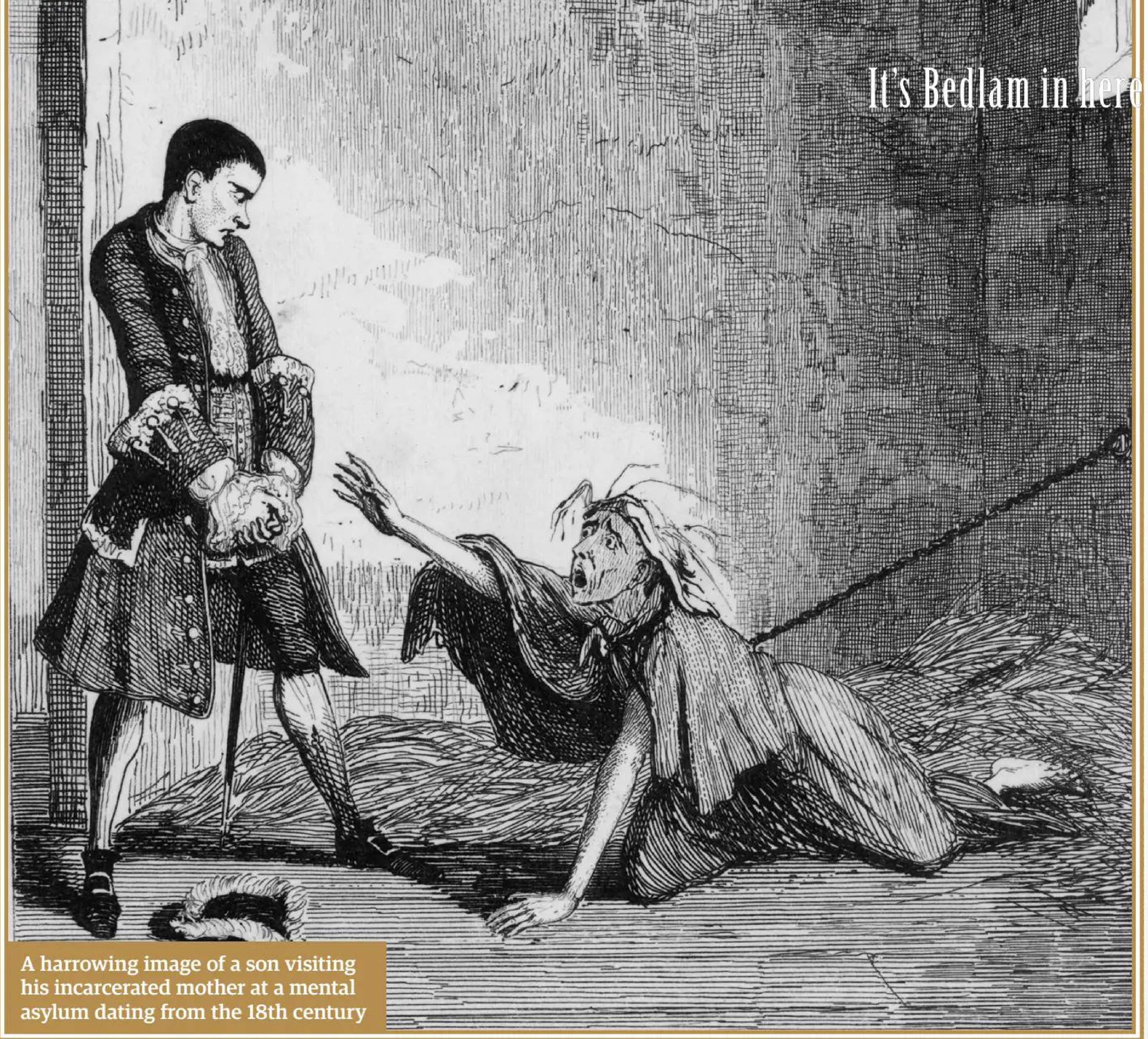
Of all the asylums in England, the Bethlem Royal Hospital in London is by far the oldest. The institution was founded in 1247 during the reign of King Henry III as the Priory of the New Order of our Lady of Bethlehem. A religious establishment, the Priory went on to serve as a hospital in the 1400s, and came to specialise in caring for the mentally unwell, or 'mad'.

By the 17th century, the Bethlem Royal Hospital had become notorious amongst the British population. It had been rebuilt in 1676 and the new premises consisted of a lavish facade reminiscent of a stately home. The vast and impressive building highlighted the perceived charitable activities going on behind its doors, to care for those who needed help. However, while the outside of the building was a picture of splendour, the interior was somewhat different. The foundations of the new building were not stable, and cracks in the walls saw water pouring in when it rained.

It was around this time that the hospital, known as Bedlam (a slang term for Bethlem that ended up becoming synonymous with madness), became a tourist attraction. The public would pay to tour around Bedlam, looking at the poor unfortunates who found themselves chained up and incarcerated there. In opening up Bedlam, the asylum could make the money it needed to make up funding for the institution. This practice stopped in the late 1700s, but the damage had been done. Thousands of people had stepped inside of Bedlam as tourists, and the stories they told of the place enhanced the asylum's notoriety.

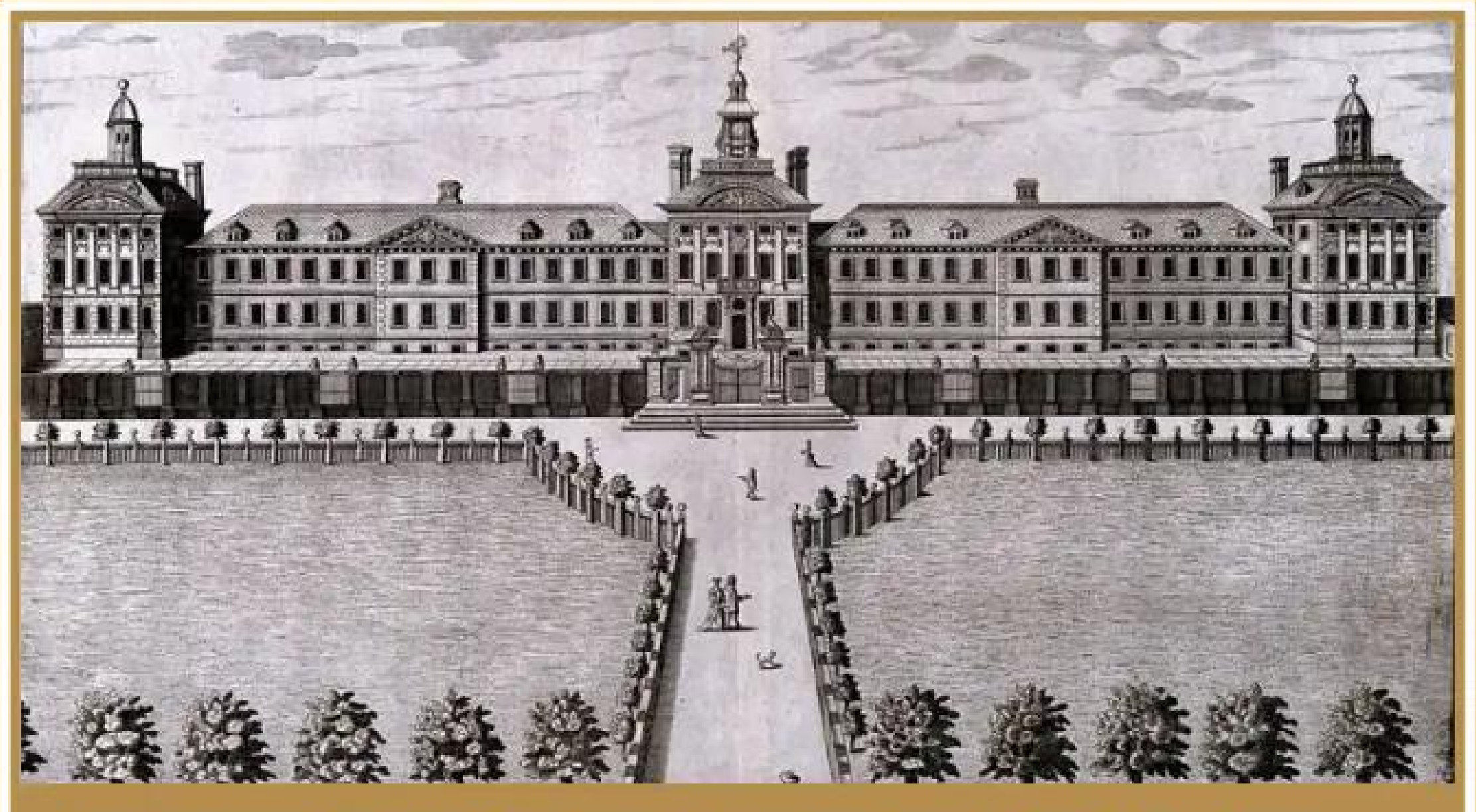


Though Bedlam had a reputation for its inhumane treatment of the mentally unwell, the Victorians oversaw a vast improvement in the treatment of patients and the condition of the hospital



A harrowing image of a son visiting his incarcerated mother at a mental asylum dating from the 18th century

"Now that it was happening to the most important person in the kingdom, the issue of mental instability could no longer be ignored"



An engraving of the grand exterior of the Bethlem Royal Hospital (Bedlam) from the 1700s. Inside, the conditions were far from ideal

and that the people who inhabited them needed more researched help. The introduction of the Madhouses Act was an attempt to regulate the shady institutions that already existed.

Victorian reform

From around 1788, King George III began to experience periods of mental illness, characterised at the time as 'insanity'. For the first time in Britain, a person of the utmost prominence and importance was suffering from the kind of illness that had previously been ignored and brushed under the carpet by the majority of the population. Now that it was happening to the most important person in the kingdom, the issue of mental instability could no longer be ignored. As a result of the king's condition, who eventually suffered a relapse in 1811 that left him permanently incapacitated, the discourse around mental illness began to develop. Sympathy and a desire to help 'lunatics' became more commonplace, and this attitude was reflected in a series of Acts of Parliament designed to improve the lot of the vulnerable.

In 1808, the County Asylums Act was passed which set up public mental asylums in counties across England. The Act effectively encouraged local politicians to invest in the foundation of new purpose-built asylums, to provide facilities for the mentally unwell people in their communities who would otherwise have found themselves in the workhouse or on the street. Though this Act went some of the way to tackling the problems facing poor mentally ill people, there was still not enough being done.

Then, in 1845, a second County Asylums Act was passed, which this time enforced the building of asylums in each county. As a result of this act, asylums began to be built across Britain in order to provide safe treatment and respite facilities for those who needed them. In the same year the Lunacy Act was introduced, establishing a Lunacy Commission to be responsible for the wellbeing of the mentally unwell. The Lunacy Commission monitored the asylums that were already in existence, as well as the newly built institutions, inspecting them to ensure the building, facilities and treatments were up to the new Victorian standards.

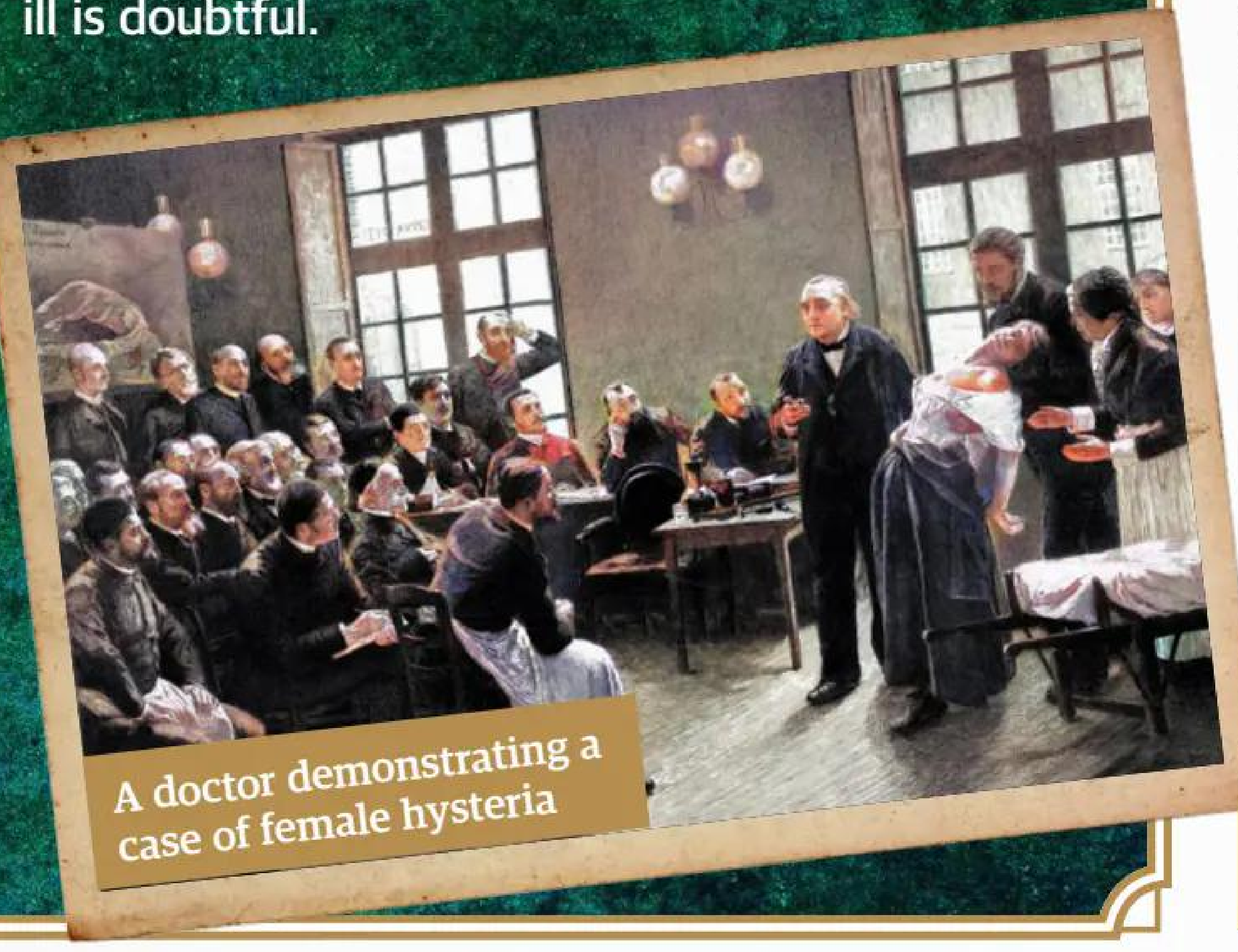
© Getty; Alamy

Asylum patients

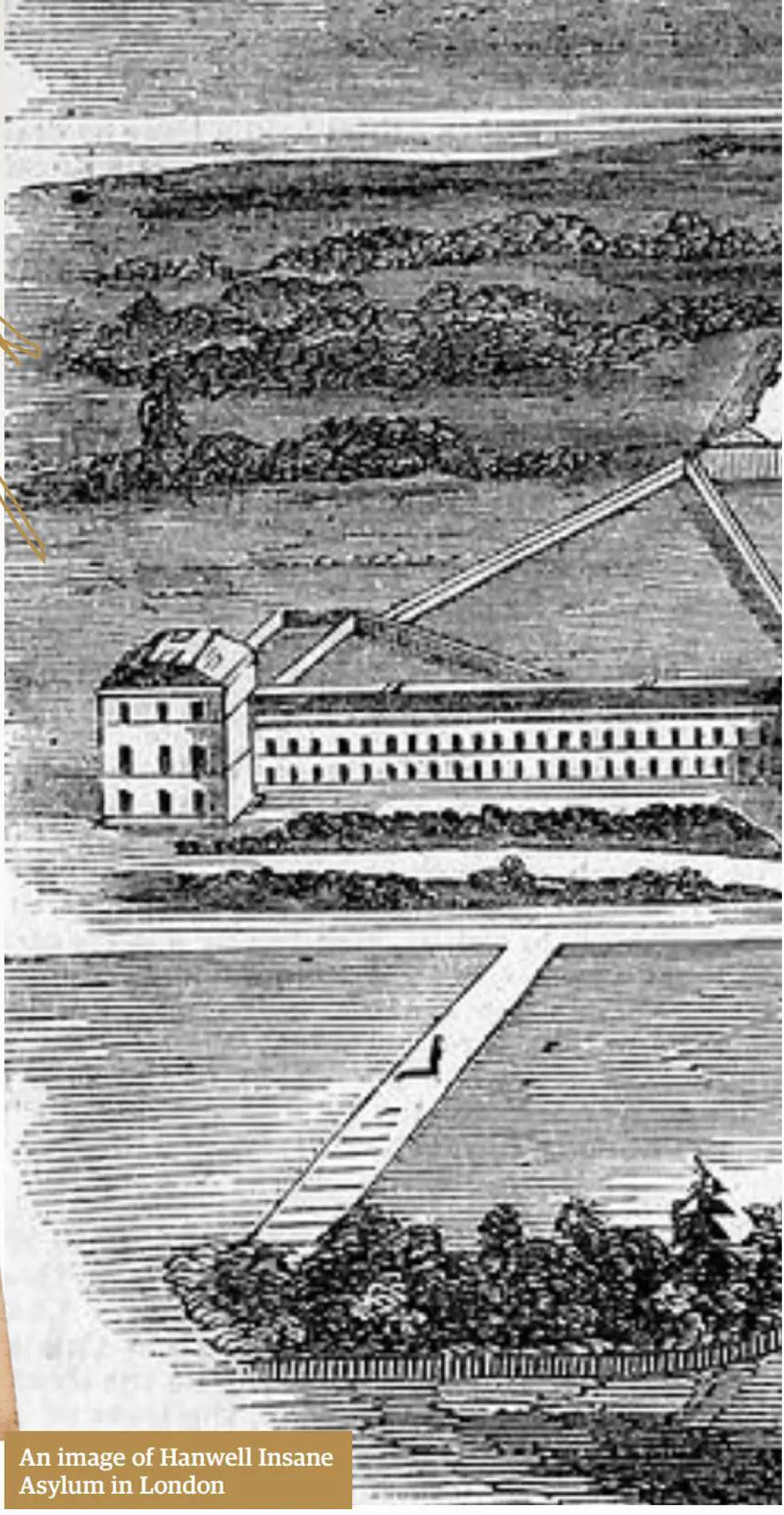
How did you end up in a Victorian 'madhouse'?

There were many reasons and circumstances that could see a person end up in an insane asylum during the Victorian period. Mental health conditions like depression and psychosis could see a person classed as a 'lunatic', as could having dementia or epilepsy. 'Idiots' were also often admitted to asylums. In this era, the label 'idiot' could be given to a person with learning disabilities that separated them from 'ordinary' members of society, and was attributed to individuals with conditions such as Down's Syndrome. Alcoholics, drug addicts and criminals were also common people to find in the Victorian asylum, and during the Victorian period of reform, efforts were made in some asylums to ensure that criminals were separated from the mentally unwell patients.

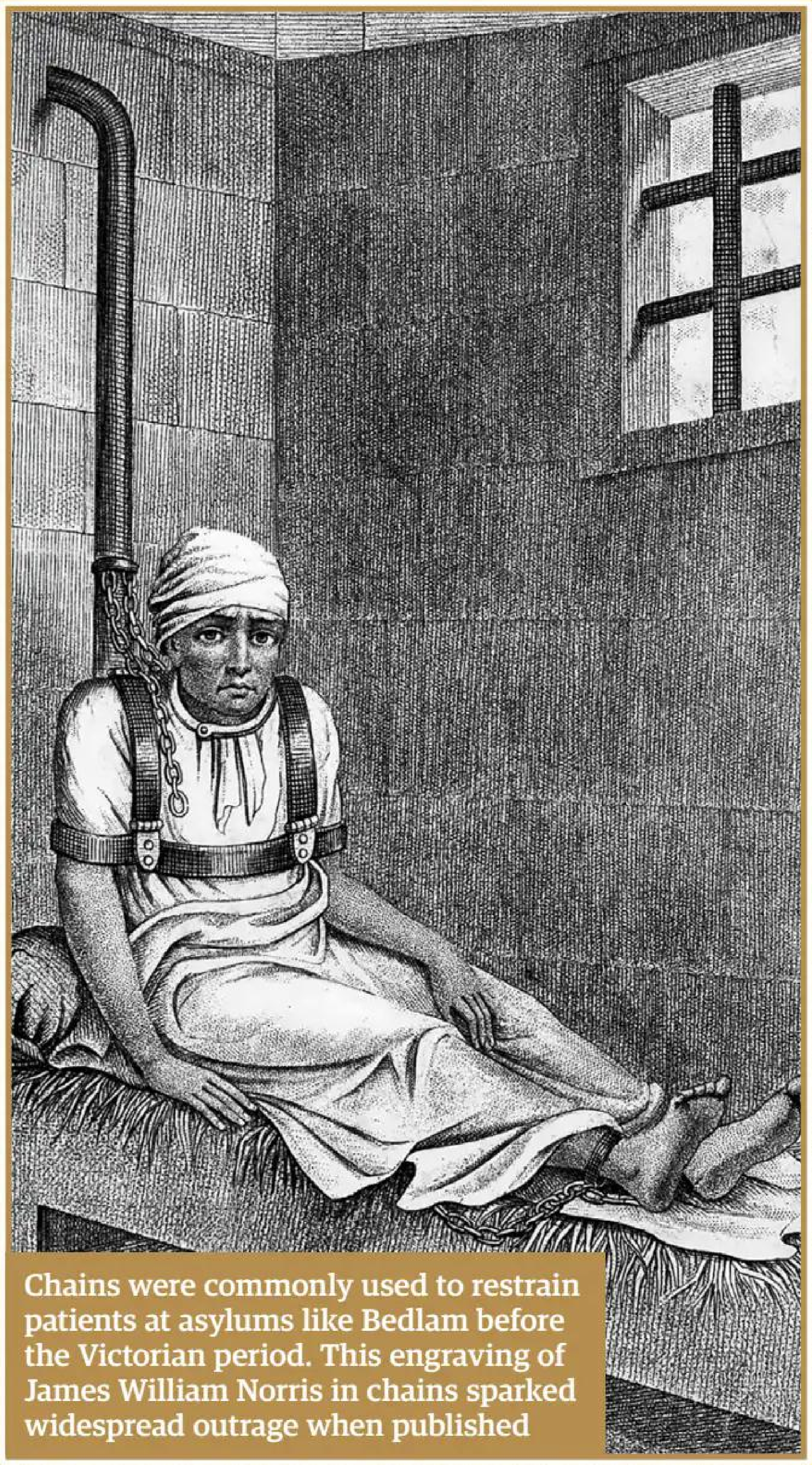
Despite all the reforms in mental health institutions, one glaring issue (in the eyes of a 21st-century onlooker) that remained was the fact that asylums were still regularly used as a way to detain people who may be considered to cause problems within wider society. Of the patients in Victorian asylums, women made up the larger proportion. This is hardly surprising, given the incredibly high standards of what a woman should be and how she should behave set by Victorian society. For women who did not fit this mould of femininity and conformity, there was a risk of being labelled 'hysterical' or 'mad' by those around them. This, in turn, could lead to a stint in an asylum. Hysteria was a particularly common affliction assigned to many Victorian women in mental health institutions. Whether they were really mentally ill is doubtful.



A doctor demonstrating a case of female hysteria



An image of Hanwell Insane Asylum in London



Chains were commonly used to restrain patients at asylums like Bedlam before the Victorian period. This engraving of James William Norris in chains sparked widespread outrage when published

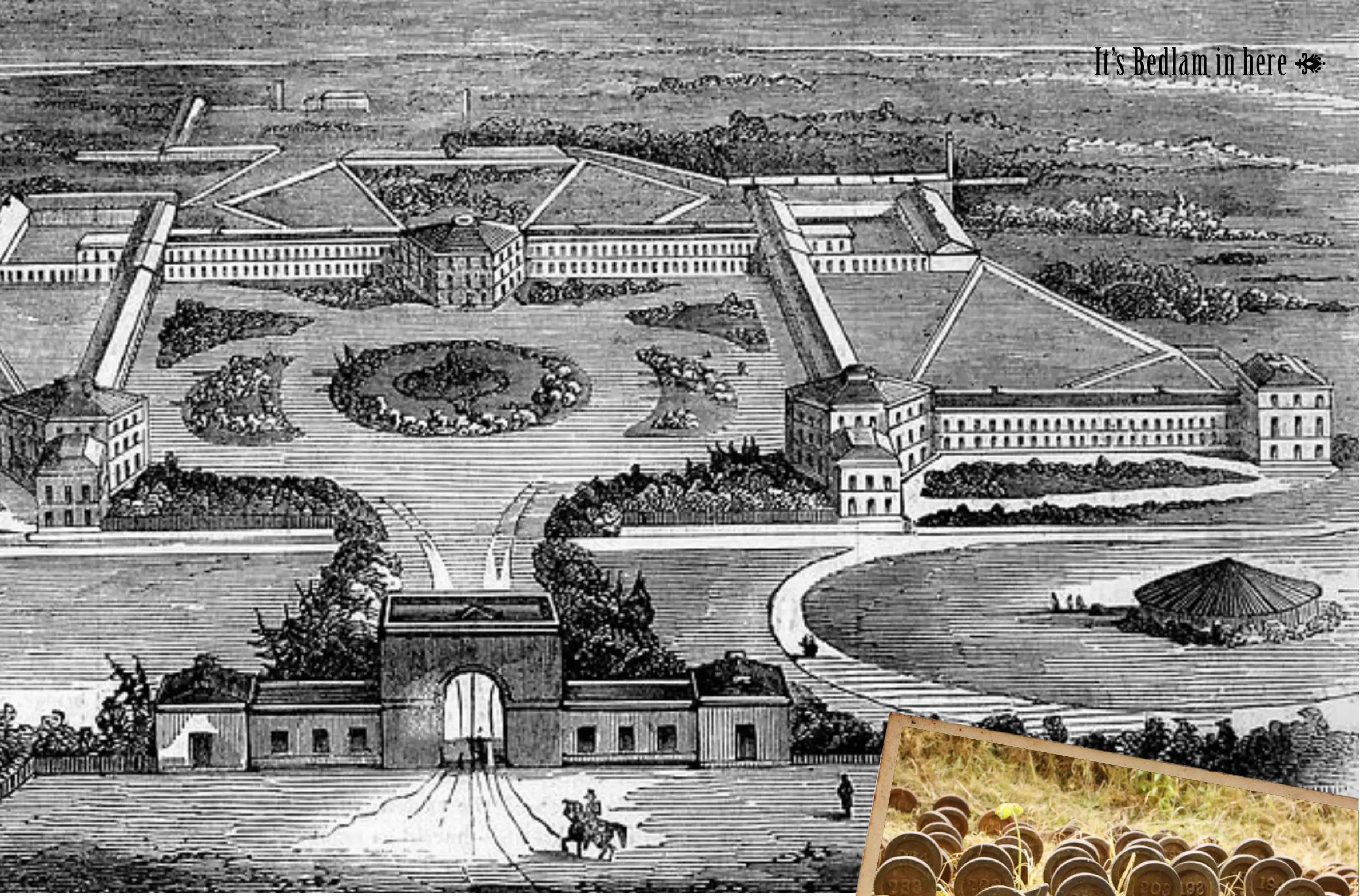
As new asylums were being built and the Lunacy Commission was overseeing their operations, remedies, therapies and medical care for those experiencing mental illness began to improve. Victorian reformers made their voices heard and campaigned for improving methods to continue in the treatment of those who had been tended to so badly. One of those who advocated for the patients in asylums during this era, and wrote about their plight, was the writer, sociologist, reformer and abolitionist Harriet Martineau.

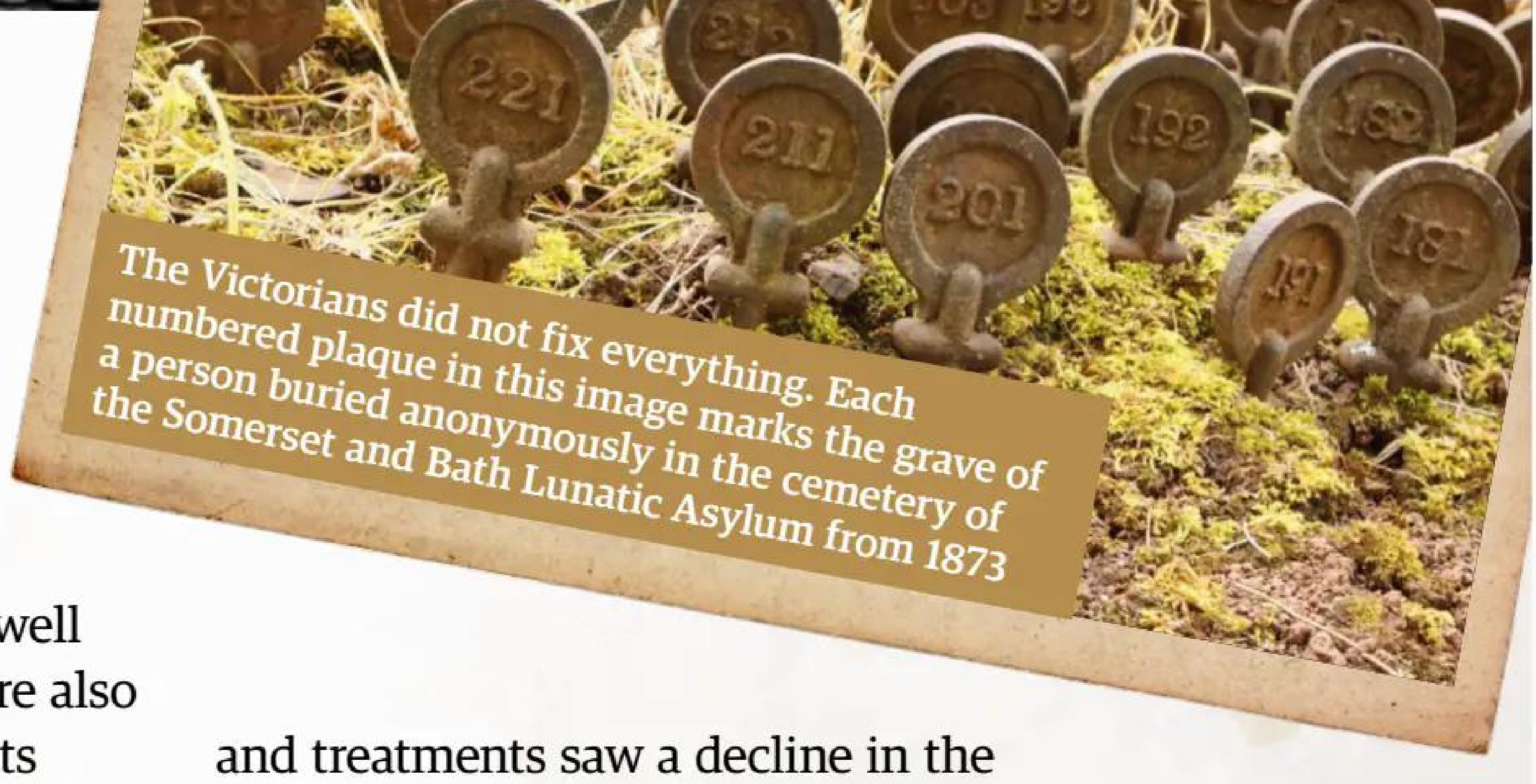
In *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine,* Martineau wrote of the conditions in asylums in 1834: "It is commonly agreed that the most deplorable spectacle which society presents, is that of a receptacle for the insane. In pauper asylums we see chains and strait-waistcoats, - three or four half-naked creatures thrust into a chamber filled with straw, to exasperate each other with their clamour and attempts at violence; or else gibbering in idleness, or moping in solitude. In private asylums, where the rich patients are supposed to be well taken care of in proportion to the quantity of money expended on their account, there is as much idleness, moping, raving, exasperating infliction, and destitution of sympathy, though the horror is attempted to be veiled by a more decent arrangement of externals. Must these things be?" By drawing attention to the despicable treatment of asylum residents, Martineau was calling for action.

Another prominent campaigner for better mental health care in asylums was Samuel Tuke, a Quaker philanthropist from York. His father had established The York Retreat in 1796 as a place for 'lunatics' to be treated with care and compassion in a calming environment. Tuke, in turn, promoted the idea of 'moral treatment' for those in mental health establishments. 'Moral treatment' focused heavily on building moral strength by giving patients tasks to do that created a sense of contribution and achievement. In many ways, 'moral treatment' was a precursor to modern occupational therapy. While this new method was far more humane than previous attempts at curing mental illness, it was still flawed with patients on occasion still being restrained if staff believed it was necessary.

Daily life in an asylum

Under the Victorians, daily life in an asylum was not as physically and mentally painful as it once had been. The new regulations and scientific and psychological research into mental health meant that patients were treated with innovative new techniques. One of the most significant developments in the lives of patients in asylums during this period was that chains came to be used less and less, meaning residents were free to walk around as they pleased. Lincoln Asylum was an early proponent of the abolition of restraints, a decision that was made when one of their patients





The Victorians did not fix everything. Each numbered plaque in this image marks the grave of a person buried anonymously in the cemetery of the Somerset and Bath Lunatic Asylum from 1873

was tragically discovered to have died after being strangled by his straitjacket overnight in 1829. Many other institutions followed suit.

The biggest emphasis within a Victorian asylum was on the importance of routine. Asylum residents were kept to a schedule of activities, and the times that they were woken, slept and fed were all regulated. For example, at Liverpool Lunatic Asylum, patients' rooms were unlocked at 6am and they were back in their bed by 8pm every day. This rigid structure was believed to help in the treatment of mental disorders and was linked to the theory of moral treatment proposed by the Tuke family.

Being out in the fresh air also formed the basis of routine in the asylum, as patients were encouraged to take walks around the grounds. Manual labour in the outdoors was a popular feature of many asylums' treatment programmes during the Victorian era, with gardening being a particularly common activity. Patients at Hanwell Insane Asylum kept their own allotments, and they would attend to them on a daily basis.

Work, in general, became a priority for those treating the mentally unwell in asylums. As many of the institutions were housed in impressive buildings, some of them effectively ran as grand houses with the patients of the asylum working to maintain and look after the building and the people in it. This was the case at Hanwell, as well as in other asylums around the country. Typical jobs and chores in an asylum varied from place to place, but patients were known to work in kitchens and laundries as part of their treatment.

Leisure time was also important in the reformed asylums and many residents were encouraged to take up activities such as sports and handicrafts, as well as developing useful skills. Social events were also organised in many institutions and big events were sometimes celebrated. At the Sussex Lunatic Asylum, for example, a Christmas Eve ball was held for the patients in 1859.

Post-Victorians

It is clear that life for the mentally unwell people of England did go a long way to improving during the Victorian era. New, more modern asylums provided safer and more comfortable places to live than the older institutions and workhouses had, and evolving attitudes towards mental illness and treatments saw a decline in the barbaric methods of the previous centuries. Under the Victorians, 'lunatics' were no longer people to be stared at as entertainment, but were becoming people who deserved to be treated with dignity in the eyes of society.

> "By drawing attention to the despicable treatment of asylum residents, Martineau was calling for action"

Unfortunately, the good intentions of Victorian reformers were not to last for long. Towards the end of the Victorian period, the number of patients being admitted to the country's asylums had grown to such a number that the institutions struggled to cope. The dedication to providing space, freedom and treatment was overtaken by the need to keep order, and many asylums began to reintroduce the use of physical restraints in order to control the expanding population within the establishments. The asylums' poor conditions returned and they became more and more congested with patients. Eventually, the term asylum would cease to be used, and mental health and psychiatric hospitals would be established in the place of the Victorian lunatic institutions.

© Getty; Alamy

VICTORIAN MEDICINE

Discover how horror surgeries and bizarre theories matured into a modern science

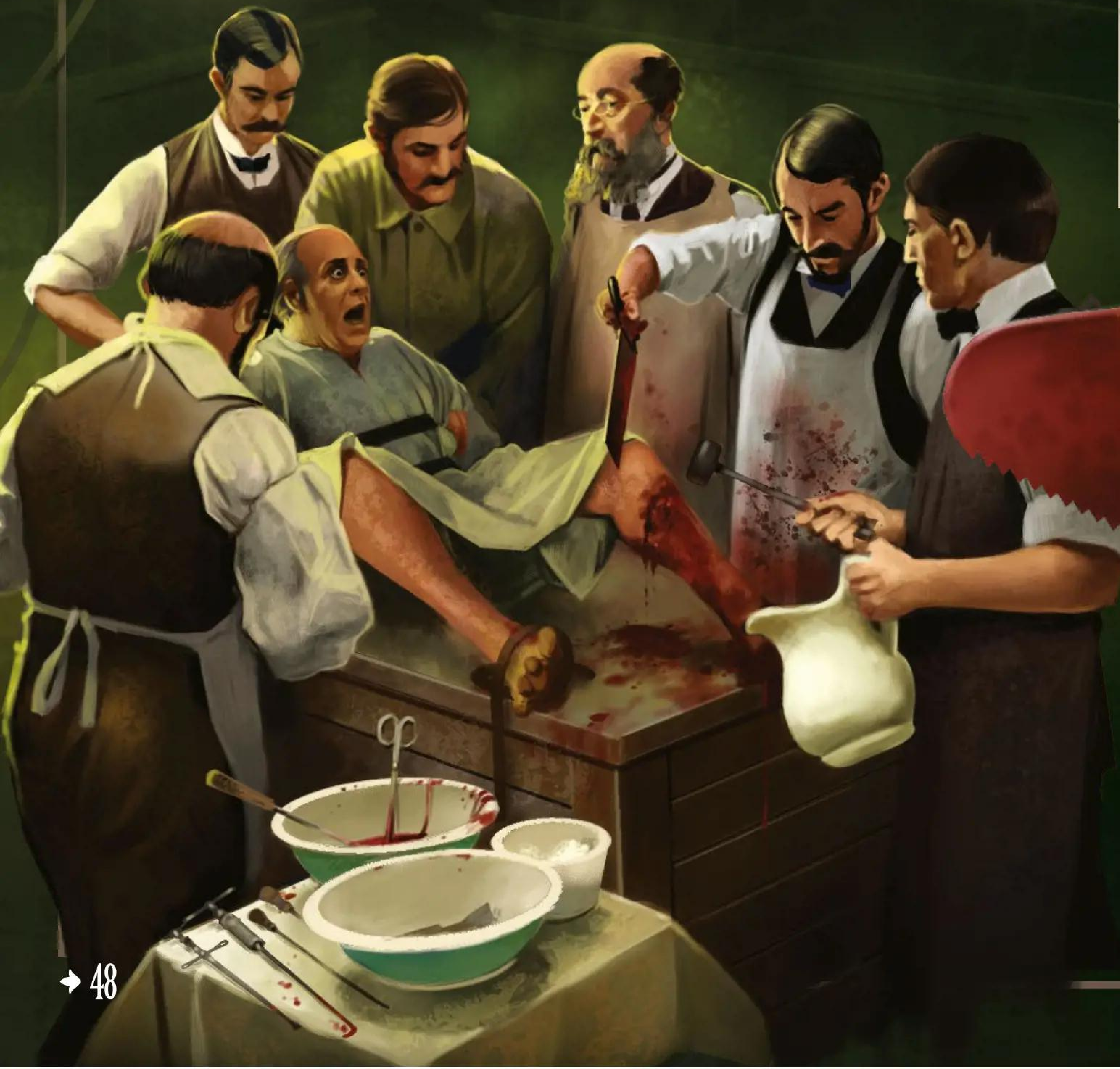
Written by Dr Agnes Arnold-Forster

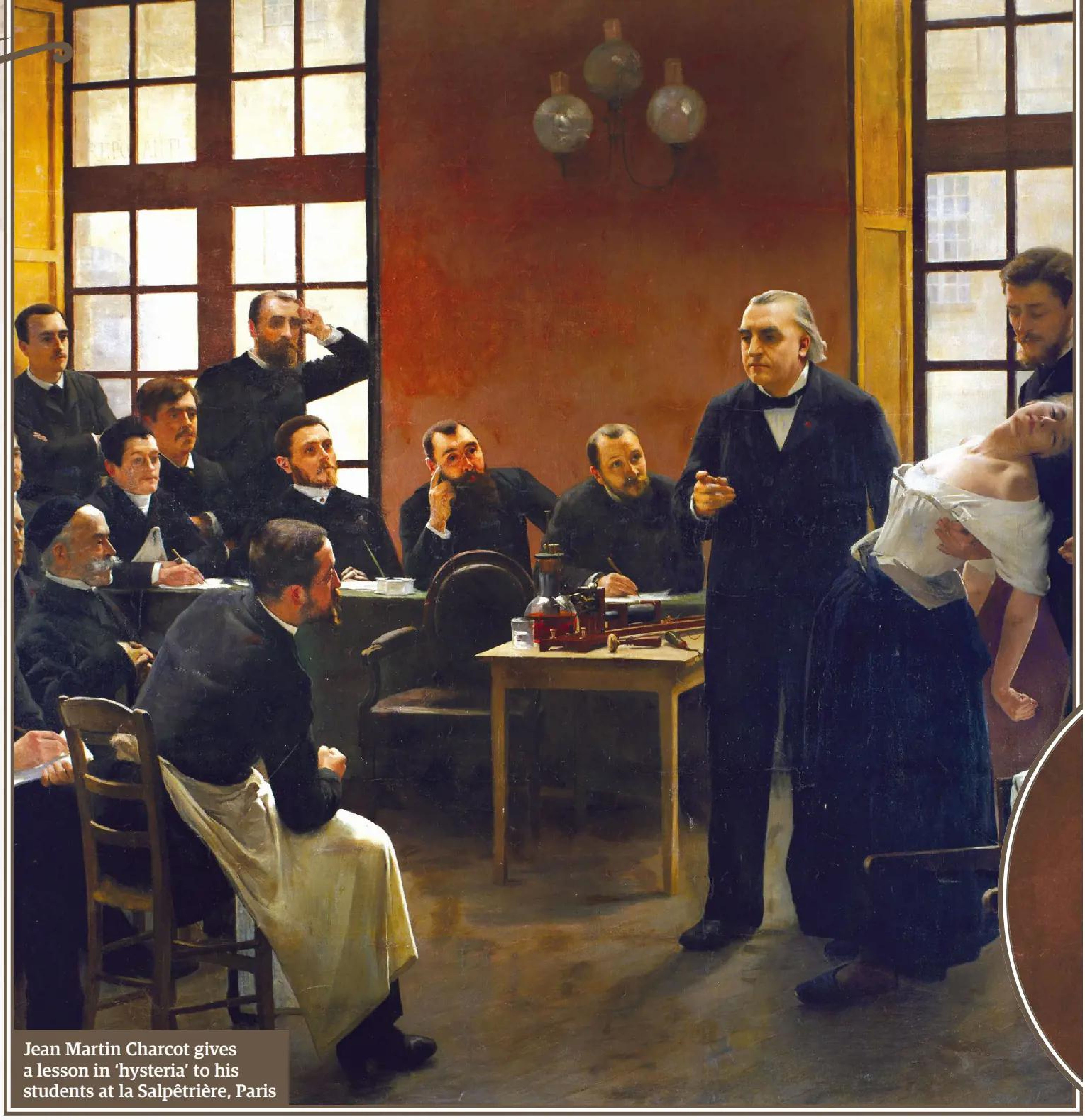
EXPERT BIO

© Steve Cross

DR AGNES ARNOLD-FORSTER

Dr Agnes Arnold-Forster is a researcher, writer and historian at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. Her first book, *The Cancer Problem* (Oxford University Press) was published in 2021 and she is currently working on a book about the history of nostalgia with Picador.




Jean Martin Charcot gives a lesson in 'hysteria' to his students at la Salpêtrière, Paris

In the early years of Queen Victoria's reign, a surgeon called Dr Robert Liston was working at a London hospital. He had a considerable reputation. In one of his many infamous cases, he was amputating a patient's leg when his flaying knife accidentally removed his assistant's fingers. The patient died from an infection, as did the luckless assistant, while someone watching the operation died from shock after Liston's knife slashed through the poor man's coat tails. It remains the only operation in surgical history with a 300 percent mortality rate.

The problem with this story is that it probably isn't true. The only evidence that it happened comes from a book called *Great Medical Disasters* written more than a century later, in 1983, by the doctor and author Richard Gordon (1921 – 2017). There are no primary sources to confirm Liston's apocryphal operation ever took place. Indeed, Gordon was more a fan of fiction than fact. He is most famous for his *Doctor in the House* series of novels that satirised the medical world of the 1950s and 1960s.

Despite this lack of evidence, the tale of Liston's 300 percent mortality rate is everywhere: in medical journals, in history books and in every biography of the man ever written. But this story doesn't just shape the reputation of Liston himself. The invention contributes to the general idea that Victorian medicine, and particularly surgery, was cruel, dramatic and bloody, and that 19th century doctors were emotionally detached, even barbaric. But the real story is a lot more complicated, and much more interesting.

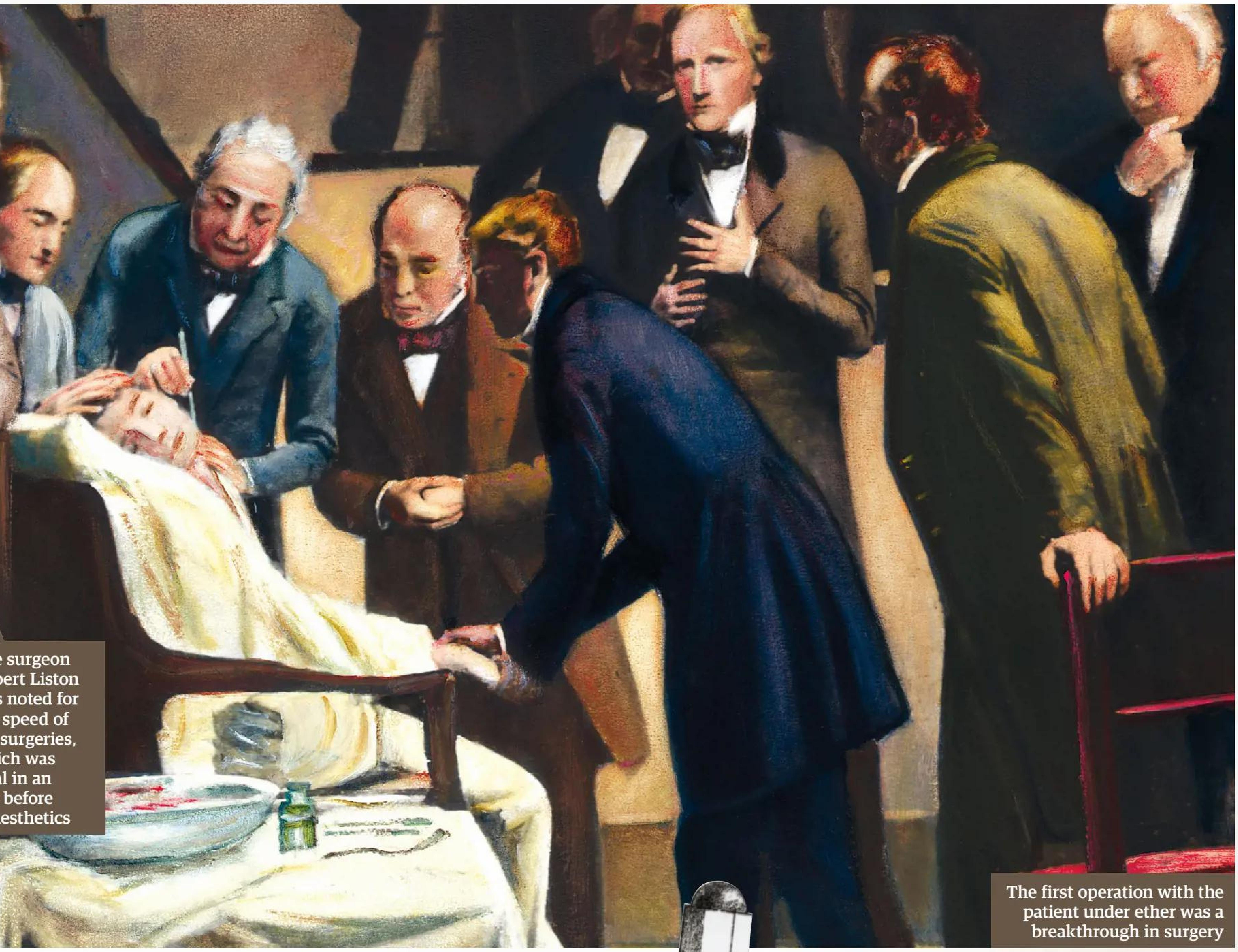
Victorian diseases

Victorian doctors dealt with many of the same diseases we do today. Patients lived and died with chronic conditions like cancer, heart disease and kidney failure. In 1856, a woman living in London called Emily Bowes Gosse felt a lump in her breast. She consulted her doctor, who immediately diagnosed her with cancer and recommended she get her affairs in order and prepare for death. She sought a second opinion, desperate for better news. But despite attempting various painful and invasive treatments, just a few months after her first diagnosis she began a rapid decline. She suffered "very much from sleeplessness" and underwent "fits of exceeding depression". At night, she experienced "the most painful restlessness". She lost the use of her left arm, and her shoulder ached. She could no longer speak or swallow and complained of the "dullness of her spirit". Emily had been an avid writer and keen Biblical scholar, but now she was "unable to read more than a verse or two at a time; unable even to bear that one should read to her." She could not be raised in bed without agony, her nights were "wretched", consumed with terrible coughing episodes, and she could no longer move her arms or legs. Bed-sores covered her body, and breathing was "performed with increased difficulty." Eventually she died in February 1857. It's quite unusual for an account of a female patient's final illness to have been recorded in such detail and survived for us to read today. But from what we do know about diseases like cancer in the 19th century, Emily's experience was tragic but representative.

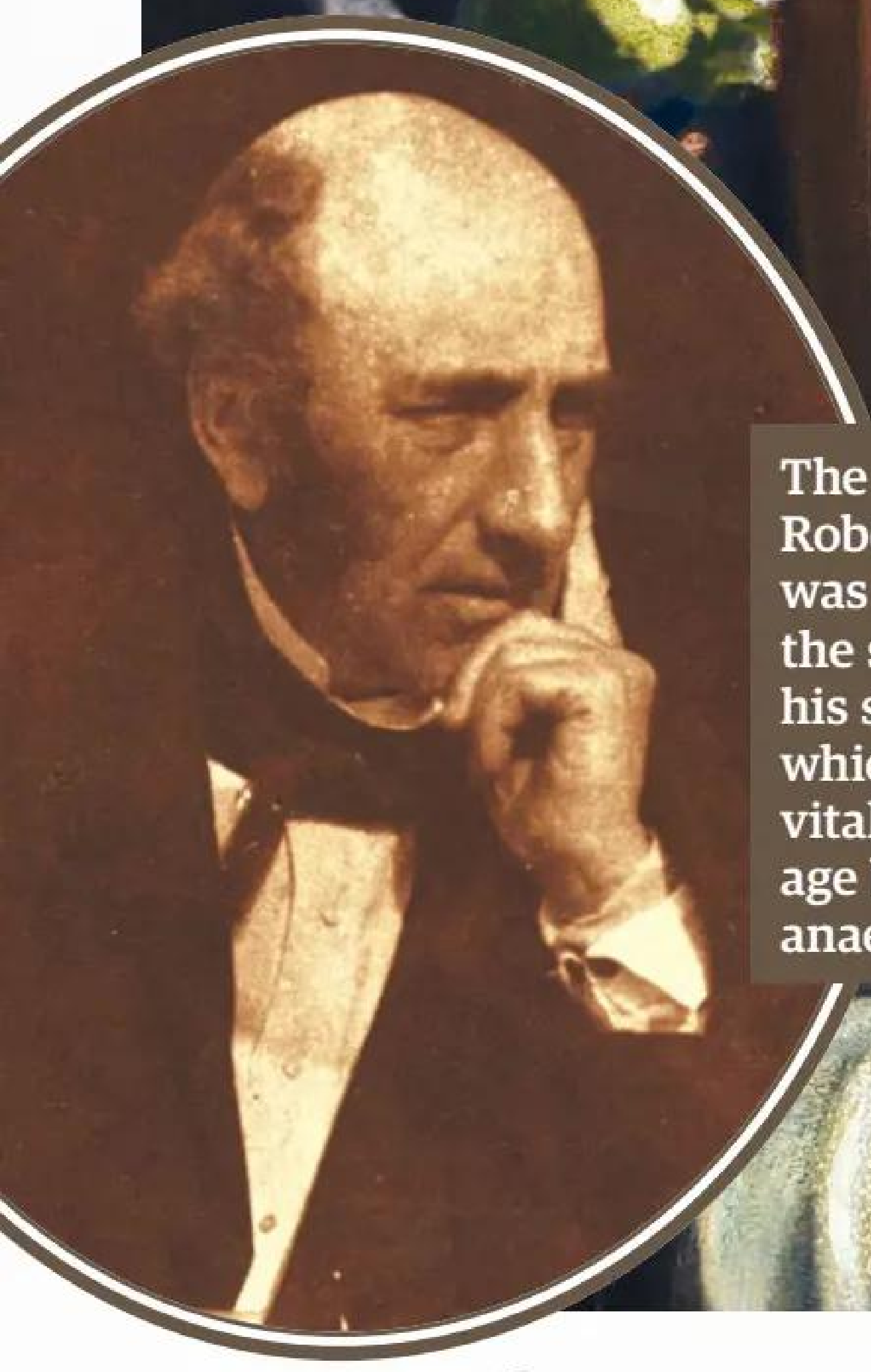
Adults and children alike also succumbed to infectious ailments including influenza, measles, the common cold and the straightforward stomach bug. Patients suffered from mental illness and psychiatric disorders like anxiety, psychosis, and schizophrenia – even if the terminology doctors used was different from our own. They bandied around strange terms like 'melancholia', 'neurasthenia' and 'hysteria' to describe conditions roughly similar to our own depression, nervous breakdowns and bipolar disorder.

They also had to treat diseases that have, at least in the West, mostly been managed, and in some cases disappeared entirely. In their millions, the Victorians died from cholera, tuberculosis and smallpox. 'Asiatic' cholera first arrived in Britain in 1832 and in that year alone 52,000 people died. Once contracted, symptoms of this deadly disease included stomach cramps, 'looseness of the bowels', vomiting, terrible pain in the limbs and severe dehydration. Sufferers appeared "sharp and contracted, the eye sinks, the look is expressive of terror and wildness…The skin is deadly cold and

THEY BANDIED AROUND STRANGE TERMS LIKE 'MELANCOLIA', 'NEURASTHENIA' AND 'HYSTERIA' TO DESCRIBE CONDITIONS



The first operation with the patient under ether was a breakthrough in surgery



The surgeon Robert Liston was noted for the speed of his surgeries, which was vital in an age before anaesthetics

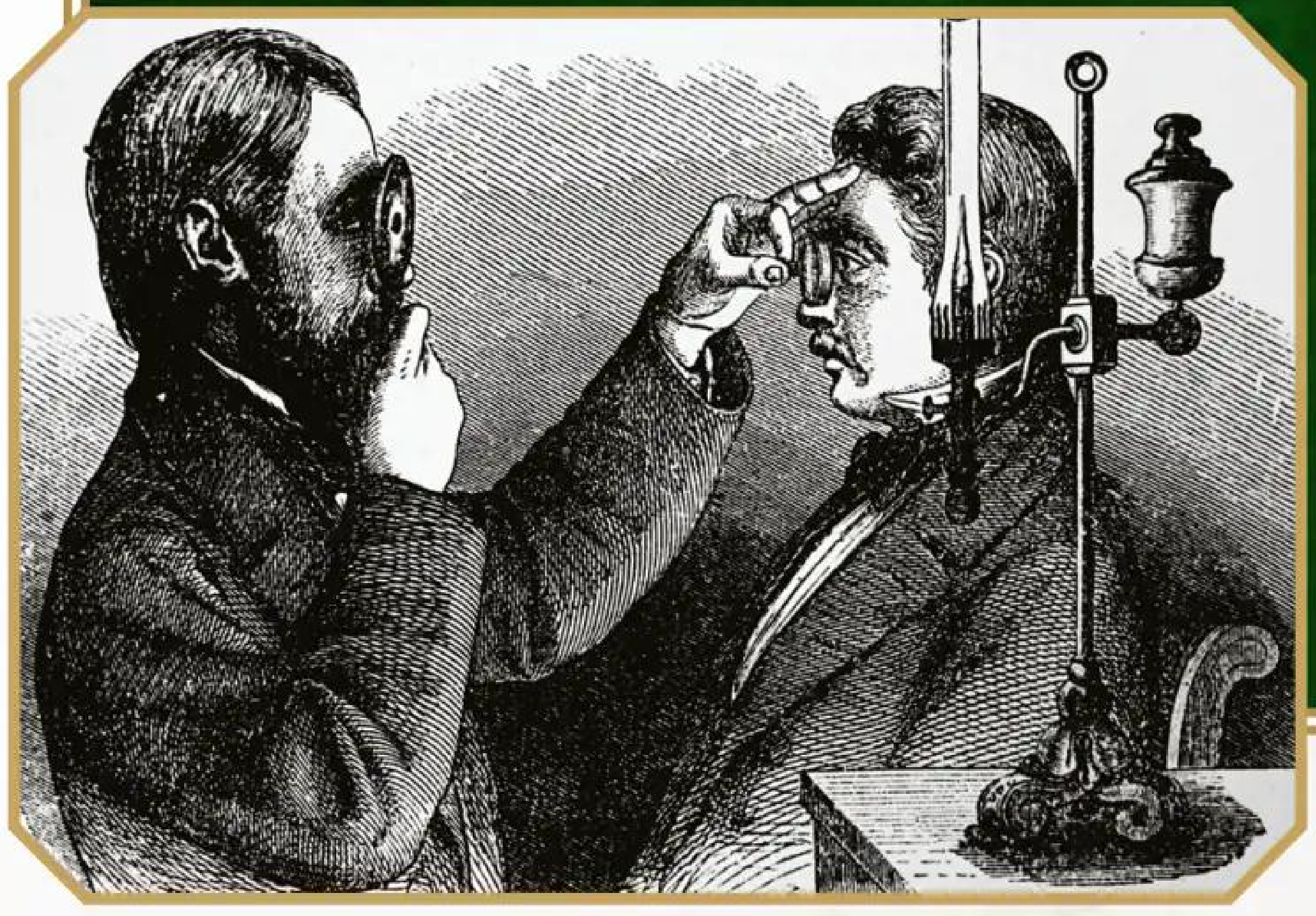
NEW EQUIPMENT

Medical inventions that emerged from the Victorian era

OPHTHALMOSCOPE

Hermann von Helmholtz, Germany, 1851

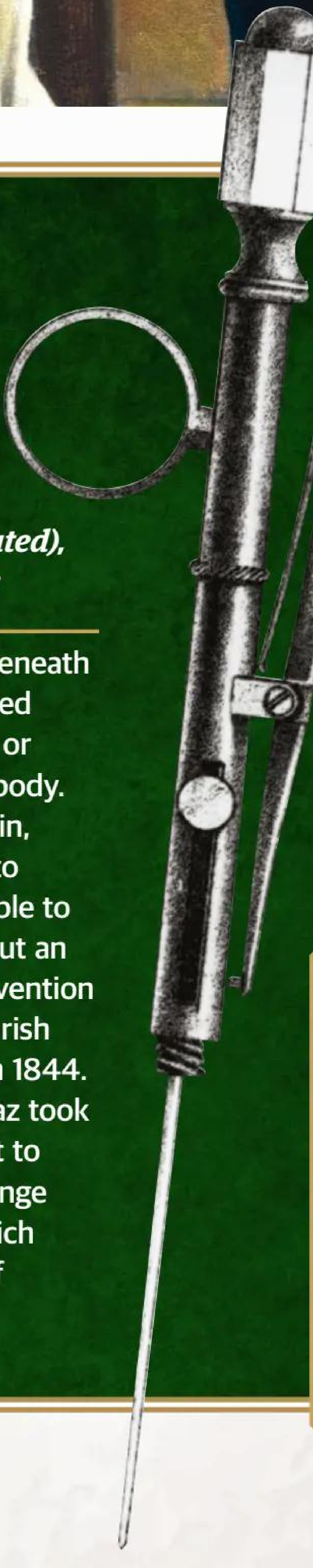
The ophthalmoscope enables opticians and doctors to closely examine the interior surface of the eye, which is useful not only for accurately prescribing glasses but can also be used to examine retinal blood vessels and detect high blood pressure and arterial disease. Glaucoma and tumours can also be discovered using an ophthalmoscope. Using reflecting glass and a concave lens, Helmholtz developed a way to enable physicians to illuminate the retina and observe it at the same time.



HYPODERMIC SYRINGE

Charles Pravaz or Alexander Wood (disputed), France/Scotland, 1850s

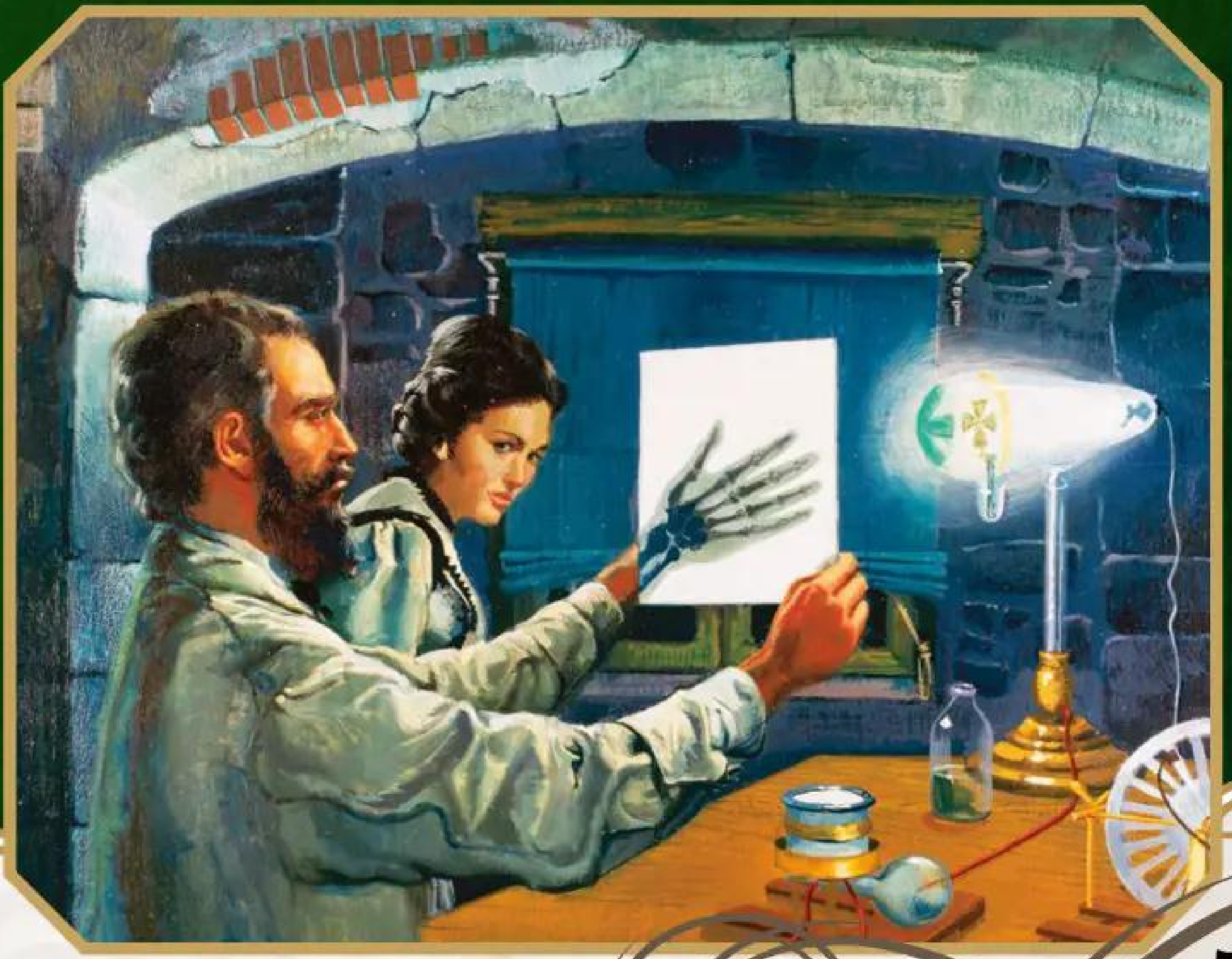
Hypodermic (meaning 'beneath the skin') syringes are used to inject substances into or extract liquids from the body. They consist of a very thin, hollow needle attached to a syringe. It was impossible to perform injections without an incision until after the invention of the hollow needle by Irish physician Francis Rynd in 1844. Frenchman Charles Pravaz took his design and adapted it to create a hypodermic syringe operated by a screw, which controlled the amount of substance injected.



X-RAYS

Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen, Germany, 1895

During one of Professor Röntgen's experiments with cathode ray tubes, he noticed a fluorescent glow was being created on a material located a few feet away from the tube, despite the fact that he'd covered it. For the next few weeks he investigated the many properties what he called 'X-rays'. He discovered that the rays could pass through human tissue, but not through bones and metal objects, and in late 1895 he took his first photograph of a human body part using X-rays – of his wife's hand.



All images: © Getty Images; © Shutterstock

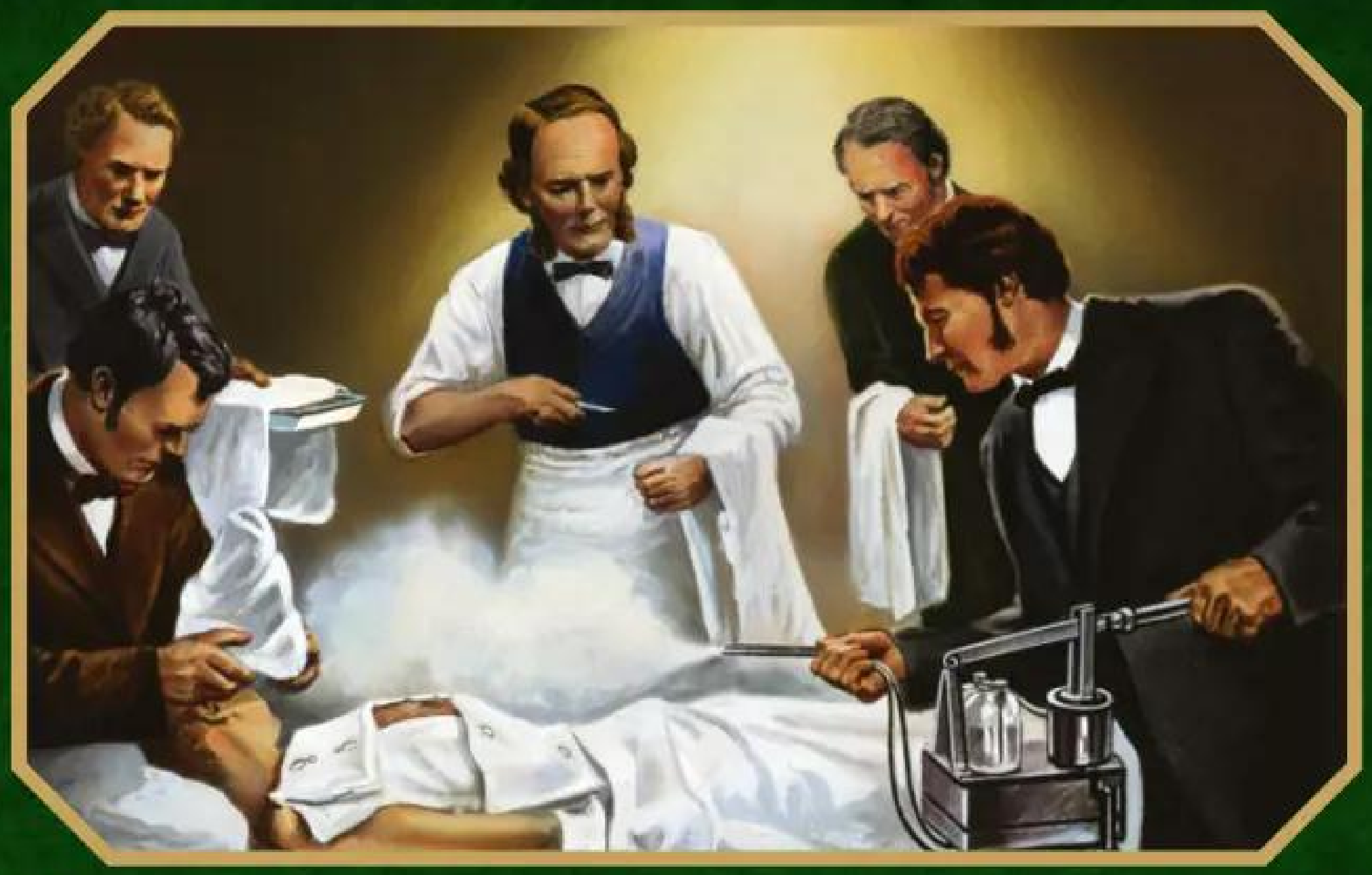
DRUG BREAKTHROUGHS

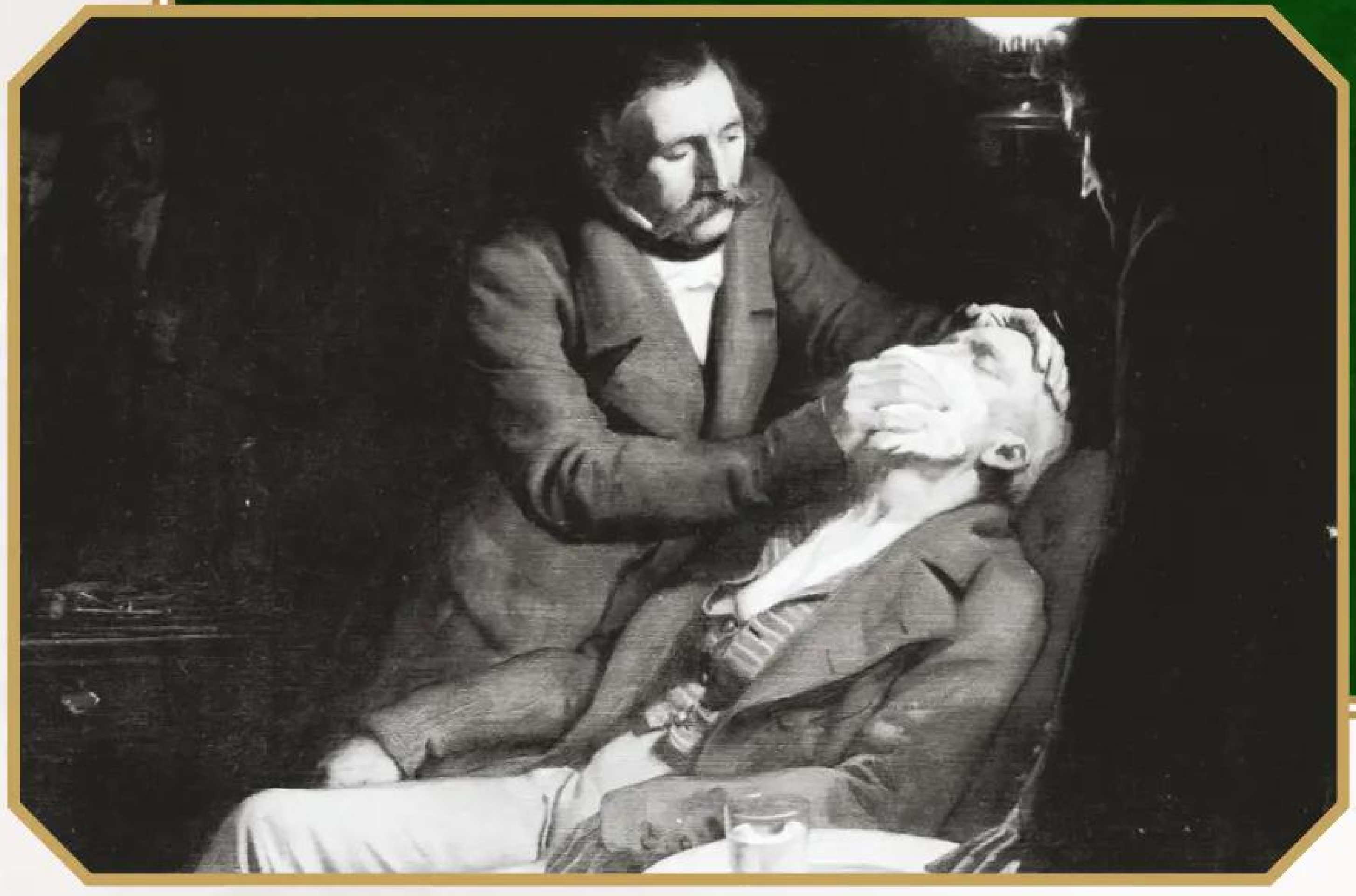
The new medicines of the Victorians

ANAESTHETIC

William TG Morton, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, United States, 16 October 1846

It wasn't until 16 October 1846 that William TG Morton's research saw the first surgical demonstration using a real anaesthetic. He had experimented with different chemicals to find one that rendered the patient unconscious so they were unable to move or feel pain while the procedure was being carried out. His chemical of choice was ether gas, given to a patient to inhale, before painlessly removing a tooth.





ANTISEPTIC

Joseph Lister, Glasgow Royal Infirmary, Scotland, 12 August 1865

Joseph Lister had been present at the first surgical procedure and was aware of Louis Pasteur's research on microorganisms. He started experimenting with chemicals with the theory that they could kill the germs before they could infect a patient. He began soaking dressings in carbolic acid and noticed an immediate reduction in the mortality rate. Lister then started washing his hands, dousing his instruments in acid, and eventually spraying the solution into the air while he operated.

ASPIRIN

Felix Hoffmann, Bayer, Germany, 1897

Willow bark has been used as a natural treatment of pain since the ancient Greeks, and French pharmacist Henri Leroux managed to isolate the key chemical, salicylic acid, in 1829. The aspirin we use today was developed in the late 1890s by Felix Hoffman. He had produced acetylsalicylic, a compound that kept the original active ingredient from willow bark but eased the nausea and vomiting that were common side effects of the drug in its pure form.

BAYER
ASPIRIN SOLUBLE
(Aspirin Calcium)
10246

often damp, the tongue always moist, often white and loaded, but flabby and chilled like a piece of dead flesh." There was no known cure and the disease could "suddenly assume a fatal form," sometimes within just a matter of hours of the first symptoms.

The poor were desperately malnourished, and lived with the after-effects of diseases of deficiency like scurvy and rickets. Childbirth was dangerous, with a high mortality rate for both mother and baby. And in an age before antibiotics, anyone particularly accident prone or who underwent surgery was vulnerable to ferocious infections and sepsis. A simple cut or a broken bone could rapidly prove deadly.

Weird and wonderful treatments

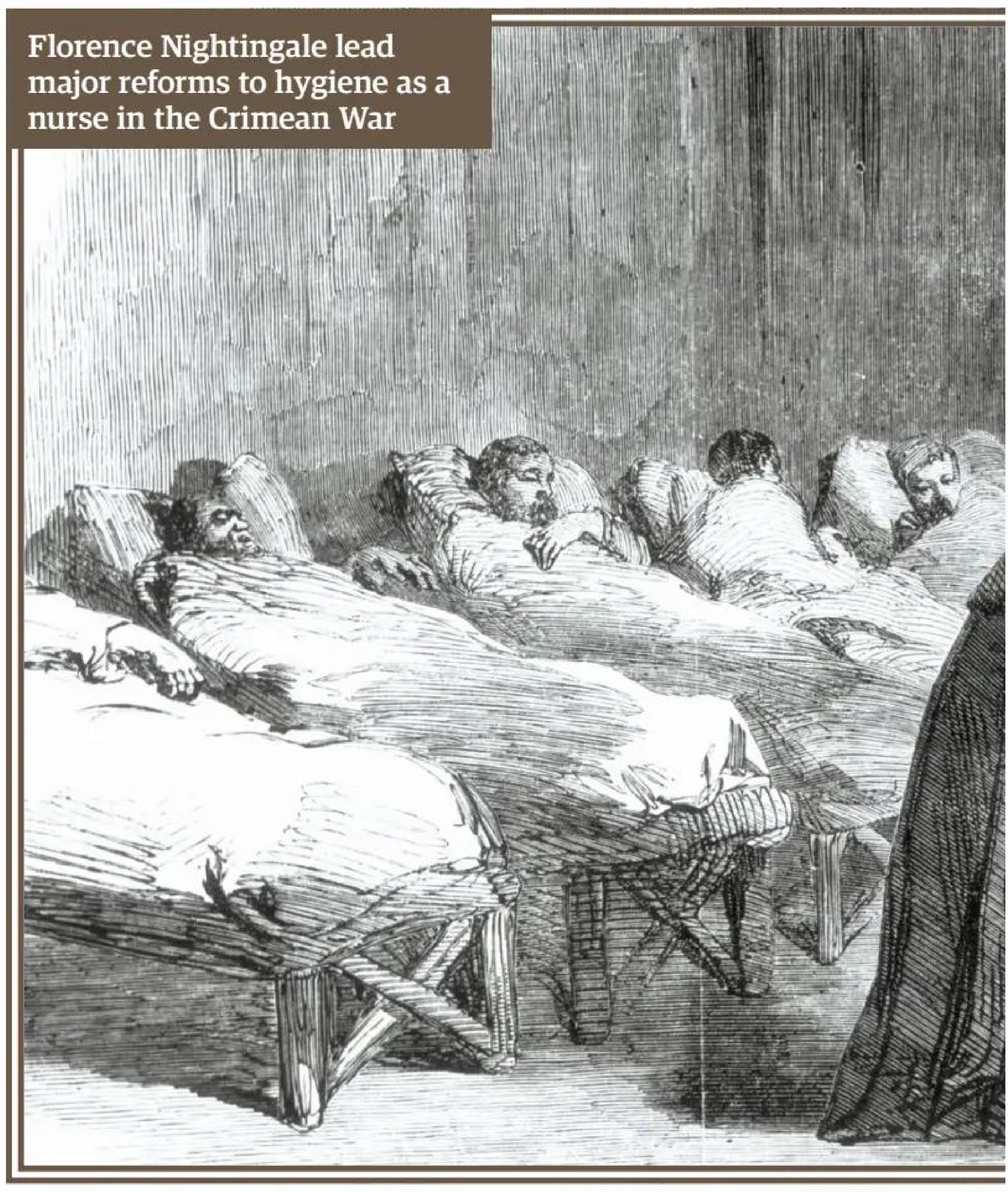
The Victorian world was a dangerous one. But doctors had a lot of weird, wonderful and sometimes quite dubious remedies in their therapeutic arsenal. Like today, cancer was treated with surgery, chemotherapies and, by the end of the 19th century, radiation therapy. Unlike today, doctors also deployed treatments like bloodletting, purgatives, leeches and corrosive substances, and even reptiles were consumed as part of proposed cancer cures. Patients were instructed to ingest noxious chemicals and tinctures including belladonna, cyanide and mercury. One physician reported a patient who, "affected with a cancerous tumour in the face," swallowed "upwards of 400 grey lizards in the course of two months." Unfortunately (not least for the lizards), this treatment was met "without obvious effect of any kind."

Some treatments recommended by Victorian doctors were a lot less invasive. Patients with an array of chronic and infectious conditions were instructed to take long walks, eat wholesome food, spend time by the sea or retreat to the Alps for the fresh mountain air.

Strange theories

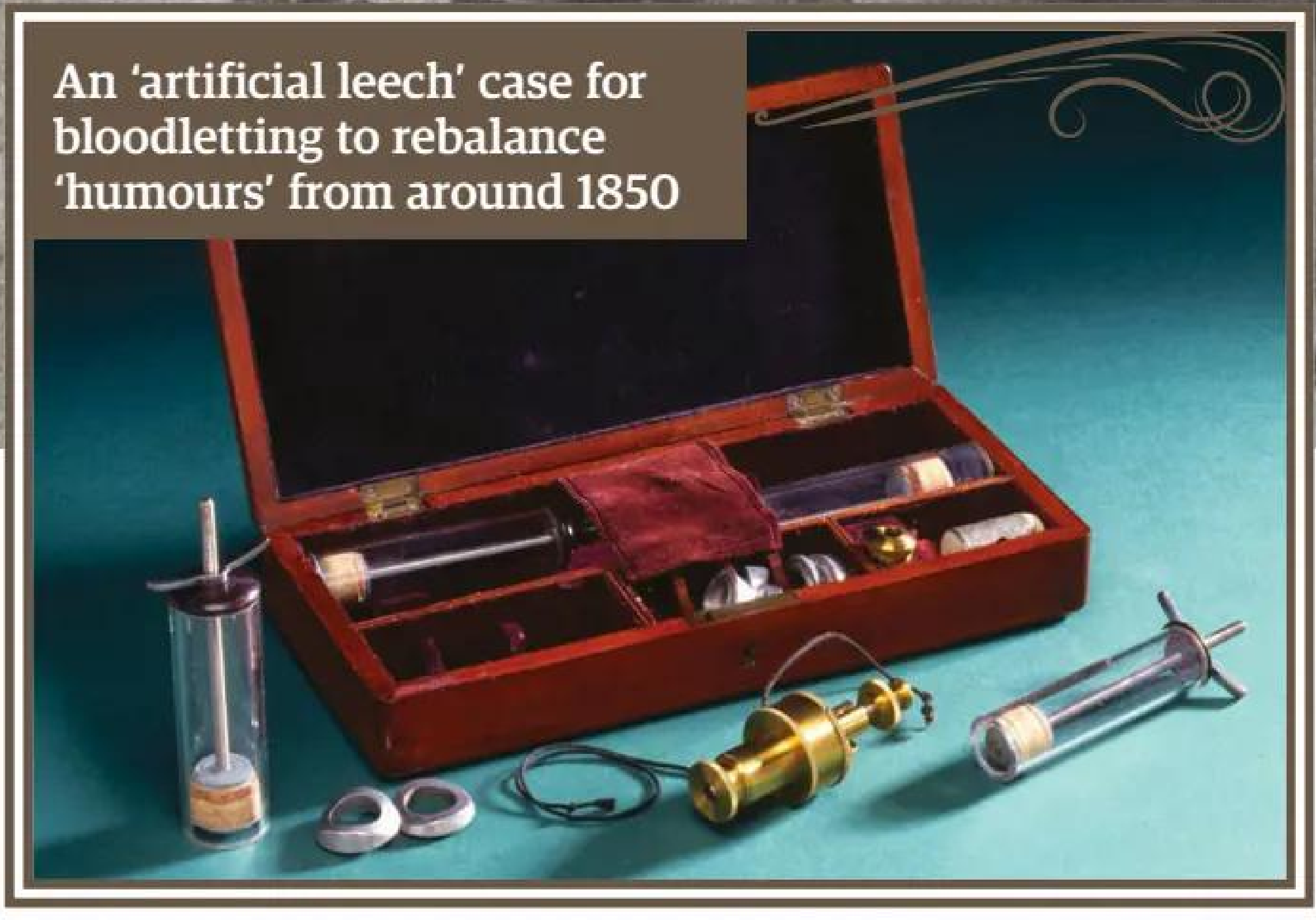
Many of these treatments were based on a very different understanding of diseases and their causes than the one we hold today. Victorians did know that some diseases could be passed directly from person to person, via invisible or microscopic 'germs'. If someone died from the plague, for example, then they knew to burn the deceased person's belongings to try and stop the disease from being spread to friends and family. Ships travelling from foreign countries, or from places with known, ongoing epidemics, were quarantined

> VICTORIAN DOCTORS ALSO BELIEVED THAT SOME DISEASES WERE CAUSED BY A MIASMA, A NOXIOUS CLOUD OF TOXIC, ILLNESS-CAUSING FUMES

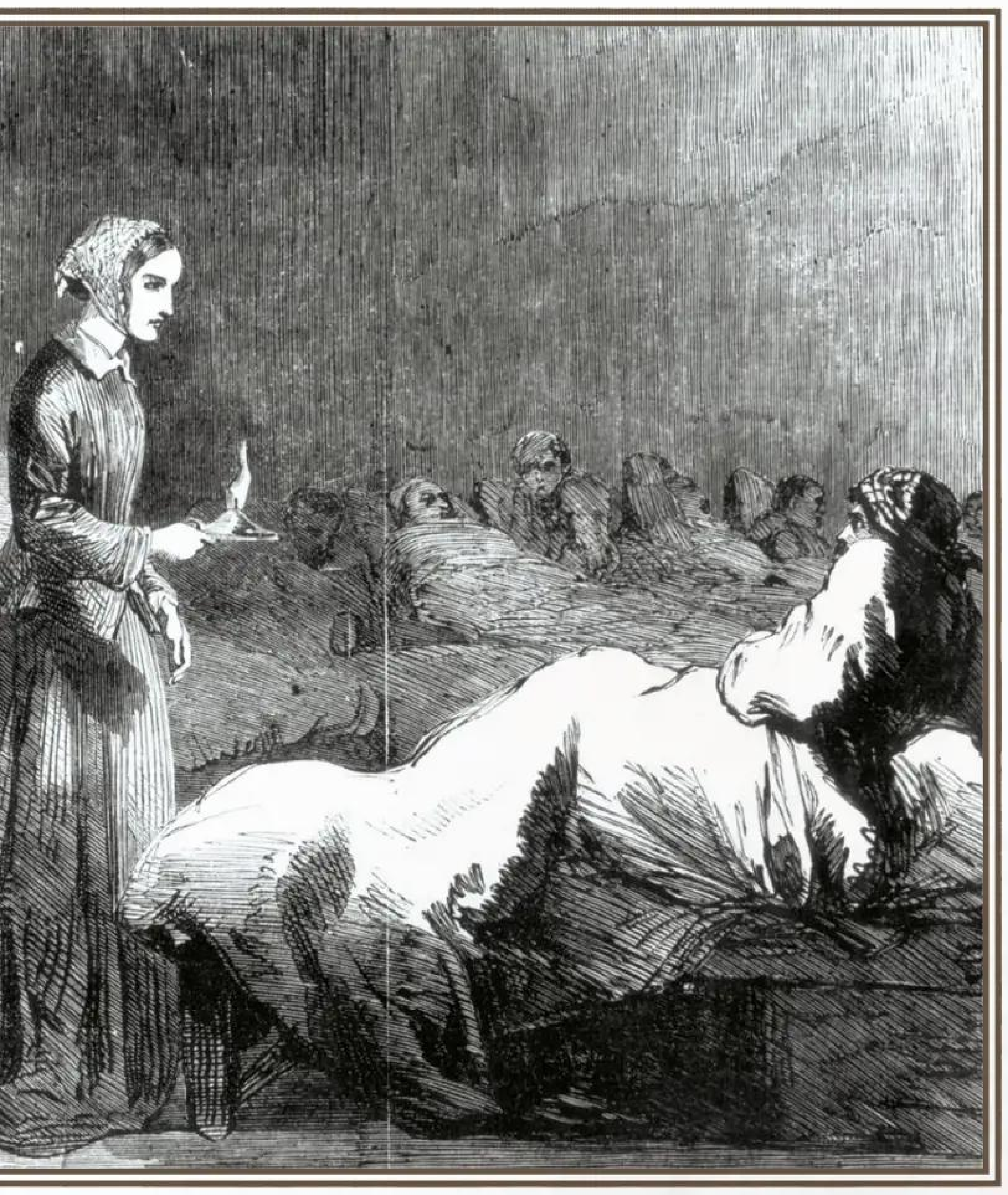


Florence Nightingale lead major reforms to hygiene as a nurse in the Crimean War

An early image of a surgical procedure being conducted in front of a full audience



An 'artificial leech' case for bloodletting to rebalance 'humours' from around 1850



in harbours and their sailors were prevented from coming ashore for weeks, sometimes months.

However, Victorian doctors also believed that some diseases were caused by a miasma, a noxious cloud of toxic, illness-causing fumes. The disease malaria, for example, literally translates to 'bad air'. Miasmatic theory suggested that epidemics were caused by this 'bad air' emanating from rotting organic matter. The theory was first developed by the Ancient Greek physician Hippocrates in the 4th century BCE. It proved remarkably enduring and influential and shaped public health responses to disease outbreak for millennia. In the Victorian age, medical efforts during epidemics focused on the removal of waste, the importance of fresh air and the need to clean up areas of towns and cities where poor people lived in cramped, unsanitary conditions.

By the end of the 19th century, miasmatic theory had fallen out of favour. After around 1880, slowly and unevenly, scientists and physicians replaced it with the germ theory of disease, which suggested that specific conditions were caused by specific microbes. For example, in 1882, the German physician Robert Koch found that tuberculosis was caused by the tubercle bacillus. Doctors used increasingly powerful microscopes to inspect bodily fluids from sick people and identify all sorts of offending bacteria or parasites. However, it took until the early 20th century for them to develop the electron microscope, which was powerful enough to allow scientists to see viruses, which were much smaller than other microbes.

This paradigm shift in how doctors understood illness was not the only dramatic change to take place in the 19th century. The Victorian era was a time of great transformation and over the course of the period medicine became more and more similar to what it is today. In pre-Victorian medicine, almost all diseases were explained by imbalance; by bodily substances or fluids out of kilter with each other. In ancient Greece, Hippocrates and his follower Galen combined craft knowledge with ancient science and philosophy to produce a systematic explanation of the behaviour of the human body in times of both sickness and health. Key to this explanation was the role of the four 'humours': black bile, yellow bile, phlegm and blood ('humours' comes from the Latin for fluid or liquid).

The various combinations of these humours in different people determined their 'complexions' or 'temperaments', their physical and mental qualities, and their dispositions: "It cannot be denyed but our minds are affected by our humours." The ideal person, in a state of ideal health, had an evenly proportioned mixture of the four but a predominance of one produced a person who was sanguine (from the Latin for blood, meaning happy or optimistic), phlegmatic (stoic or calm), choleric (bad tempered or irritable) or melancholic (sad). Each complexion was associated with specific characteristics, and the words carried a weight that they've since lost. For example, a choleric man was not only quick to anger but also yellow-faced, lean, hairy, proud, ambitious, revengeful and shrewd.

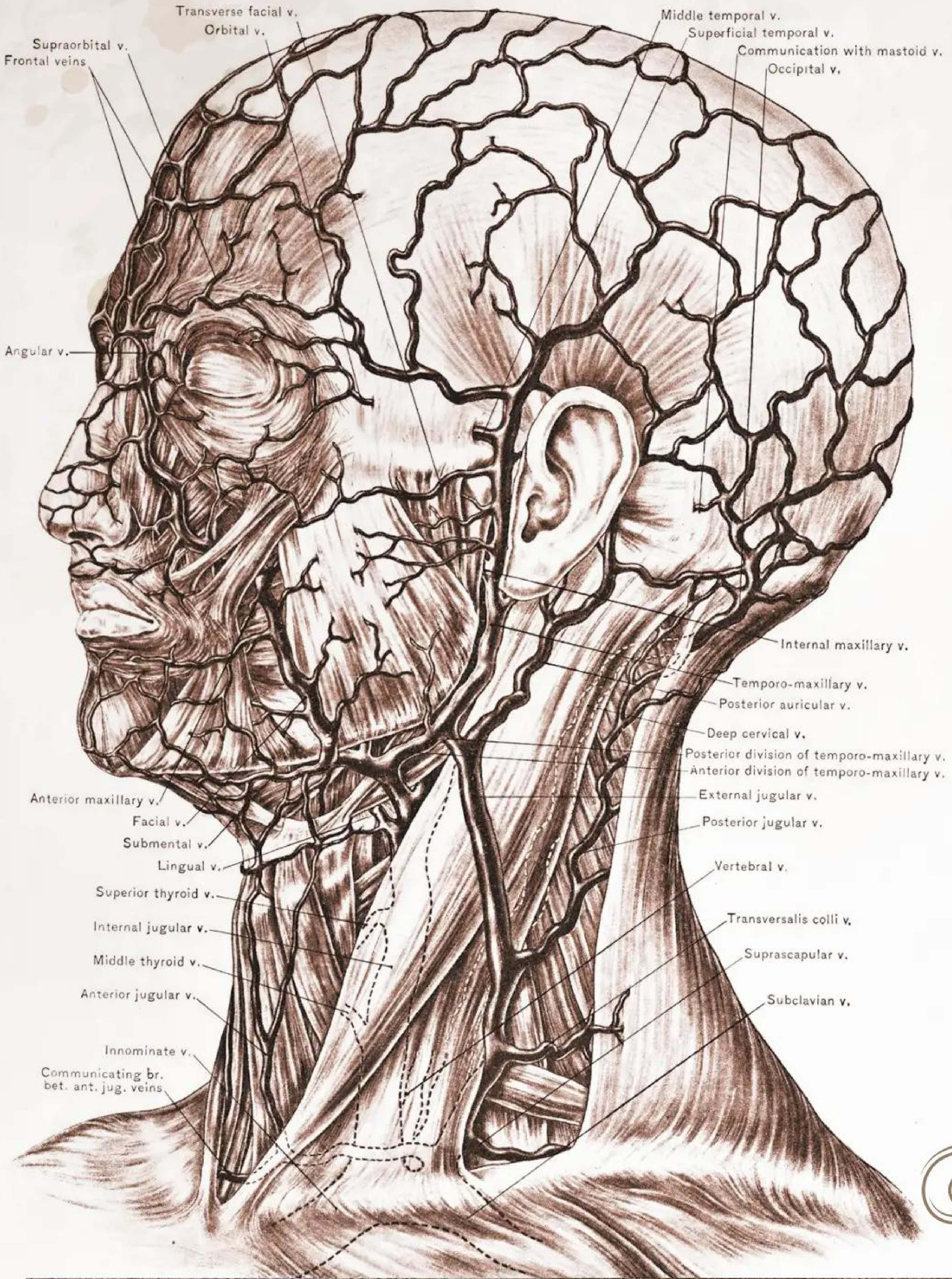
The humours also dictated disease. An excess of one fluid or another could explain someone's symptoms. Cancer, for example, was thought to be an excess in black bile congealing in a certain part of the body, amalgamating into a malignant tumour. Each humour had its own characteristic or complexion: hot, cold, wet and dry. Curing an illness involved identifying the imbalance in humour or complexion and rectifying it. A cold injury or illness must be treated with a cold remedy and vice versa.

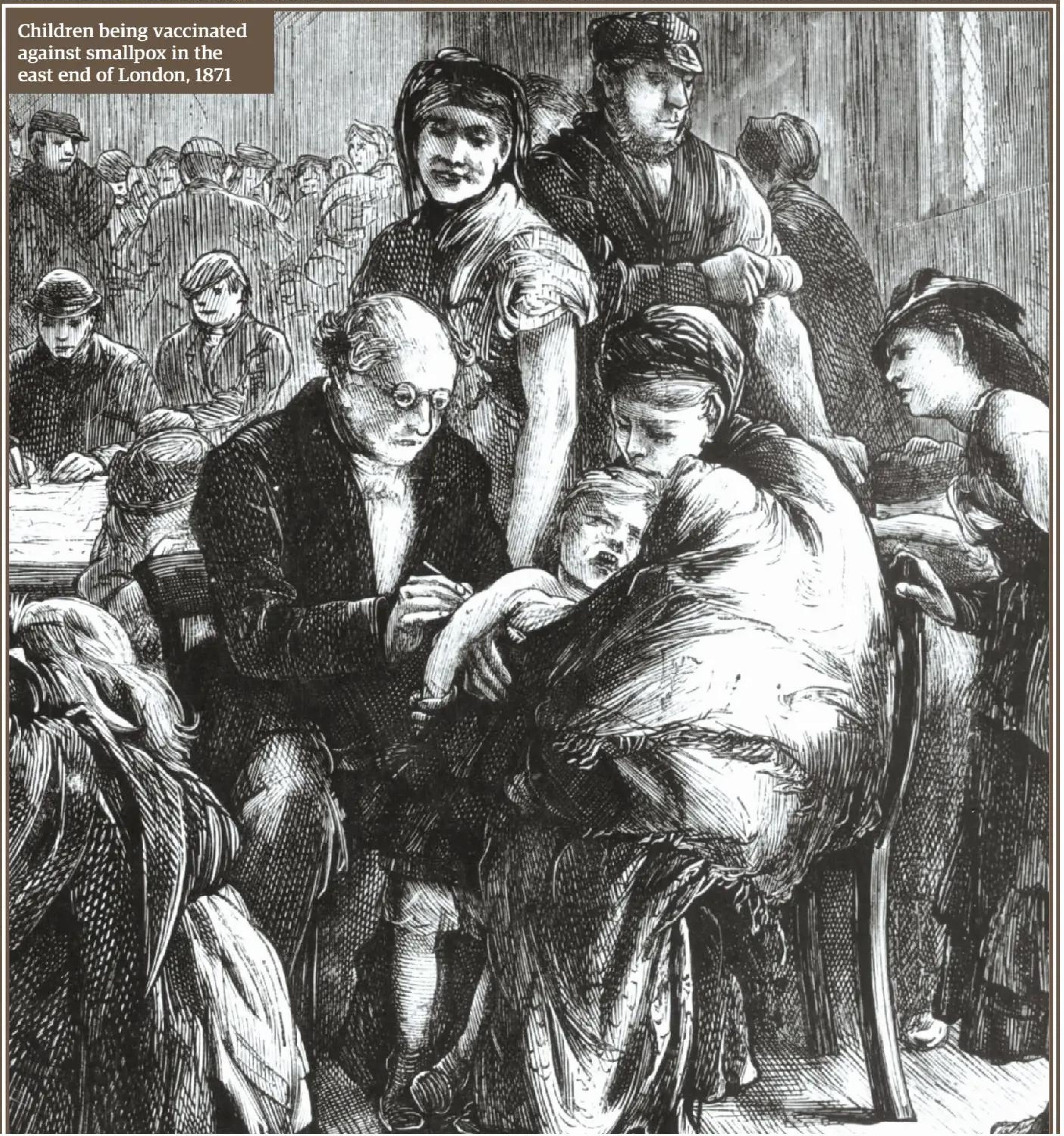
When these humours were in balance, health prevailed; when they were out of balance, disease took over. People and their physicians collaborated to keep the humours in check and restore equilibrium by adjusting diet, exercise and the evacuation of bodily fluids. As the 19th century progressed, humoral theory – like miasmatic theory – slowly faded from view. While they might sound strange to modern ears, these ideas still circulate today. People might be described as 'hot-headed' or they might 'catch a cold' from the temperature of the air or the changing season.

Medicine becomes modern

New ideas, treatments and techniques were developed, but the profession of medicine also changed dramatically. Before the 19th century, doctors were held in relatively low regard, part of a busy medical marketplace populated by "mere retailers of physic," butchers, barbers, quacks and "nostrum sellers." While there were elite physicians, like the medical men who attended royalty and the aristocracy, most providers of medical care and treatment were relatively untrained, or trained via apprenticeship. The conventional hierarchy placed physicians above surgeons – with apothecaries and alternative practitioners somewhere below the two. Physicians traditionally trained at either Oxford or Cambridge and received broad educations full of classical literature, ethics and physiology. In the 18th century, doctors received very little practical education. In contrast, surgeons were mostly trained on the job, by apprenticeship, and had only recently separated themselves from butchers and barbers. At this time, almost anyone could claim to be a healer and the buying and selling of medicines was largely unregulated.

In the early 19th century, all that started to change. More and more doctors, regardless of status, pursued university degrees, training for surgeons in particular became more formalised, and the Apothecaries' Act (1815) and the Anatomy Act (1832) both attempted to differentiate various professionals from one another and distinguish


Transverse facial v.
Orbital v.
Supraorbital v.
Frontal veins
Middle temporal v.
Superficial temporal v.
Communication with mastoid v.
Occipital v.
Angular v.
Internal maxillary v.
Temporo-maxillary v.
Posterior auricular v.
Deep cervical v.
Posterior division of temporo-maxillary v.
Anterior division of temporo-maxillary v.
Anterior maxillary v.
External jugular v.
Facial v.
Posterior jugular v.
Submental v.
Lingual v.
Vertebral v.
Superior thyroid v.
Internal jugular v.
Transversalis colli v.
Middle thyroid v.
Suprascapular v.
Anterior jugular v.
Subclavian v.
Innominate v.
Communicating br. bet. ant. jug. veins.



Children being vaccinated against smallpox in the east end of London, 1871

All images: © Alamy, © Getty Images

A reenactment of only the third ever operation conducted under ether

ALMOST ANYONE COULD CLAIM TO BE A HEALER AND THE BUYING AND SELLING OF MEDICINES WAS LARGELY UNREGULATED

them from unregulated healers or 'quacks'. The 1858 Medical Act gave statutory recognition for the first time to a distinct occupational category of "legally qualified Medical Practitioner." However, plenty of doctors at the time were concerned that the legislation didn't go far enough. Some reformers were bitterly disappointed, for example, that the Act did not criminalise unregulated practice, or 'quackery'.

Dangerous hospitals

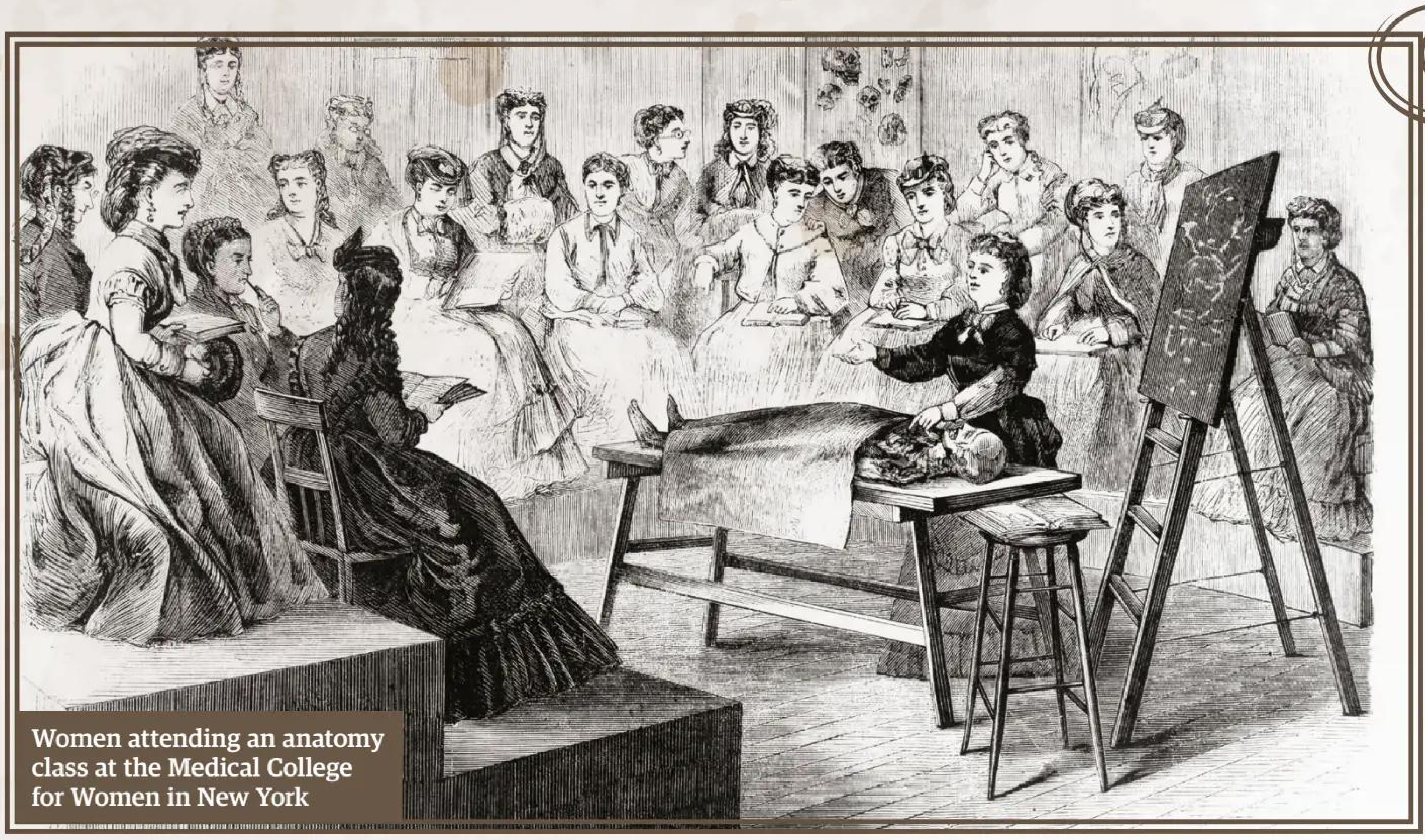
In the 18th century there were relatively few hospitals, but as the Victorian age got underway more and more specialist institutions were established. Hospitals dedicated to specific diseases like cancer and tuberculosis started to be built. And institutions dedicated to certain types of patients like lying-in hospitals for pregnant women and asylums for the mentally ill exploded in number. Before Queen Victoria ascended the throne, few people were treated in a hospital. They were dirty, dangerous places that were seen as a last resort for the sick poor. As the medical historian Lindsey Fitzharris puts it, in the 19th century "patients worldwide came to… dread the word 'hospital'." Wealthy patients were largely treated in their own homes, by their own private physician. By the end of the 19th century, hospitals had undergone something of a transformation. They were larger, cleaner, staffed by specialists and frequented by a larger cross-section of society. Fitzharris describes the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh at the beginning of the 20th century, after a century of slow change, as "bright, clean and well ventilated. No longer a house of death, it was a house of healing."

The Butchering Art

As hospitals became more numerous, and safer, surgery also became more common. The reputation of the profession at the beginning of the 19th century was pretty poor. Stories like the one about Liston's 300 per cent death rate were fictional, but nonetheless characterised the way surgeons were seen by ordinary people in the early days of Queen Victoria's reign. But as their training became more formalised, and as surgeons themselves attempted to reform their own image, the profession became increasingly respected. This transformation was helped by the introduction of anaesthesia in the 1840s. In 1846, Boston dentist William TG Morton used sulfuric ether to anaesthetise a man who needed surgery to remove a vascular tumour from his neck. In Scotland in 1847, obstetrician James Y Simpson started giving women chloroform to ease the pain of childbirth, and in 1853 the physician John Snow popularised anaesthesia by chloroforming Queen Victoria for the birth of her son Prince Leopold.

Despite these efforts, the widespread adoption of anaesthesia was relatively slow and uneven. The anaesthetics available were unpredictable and in some cases dangerous. Patients weren't used to being knocked out and some surgeons also believed that pain was a crucial and helpful tool during operations. Surgery also did not simply 'get better' after the introduction of anaesthesia. Operations before anaesthesia were performed much more quickly, and the surgeons of the early 19th century were frequently highly skilled and deeply invested in the pain and suffering of their patients, despite their bloody and barbarous reputation. For example, Scottish surgeon Charles Bell (1774 – 1842) wrote to his wife that he was "wearied – exhausted by the sufferings of others." He once told his brother: "I have had a most miserable time since I wrote to you, from the failure of an operation, and the death of a most worthy man. I shall regret it as long as I live."

Nevertheless, with the introduction of anaesthesia, surgery became a less daunting undertaking for both doctor and patient and operations became more common, especially after the development of antiseptic surgery by Joseph Lister in the 1860s and 1870s. Lister used carbolic acid to clean instruments and the

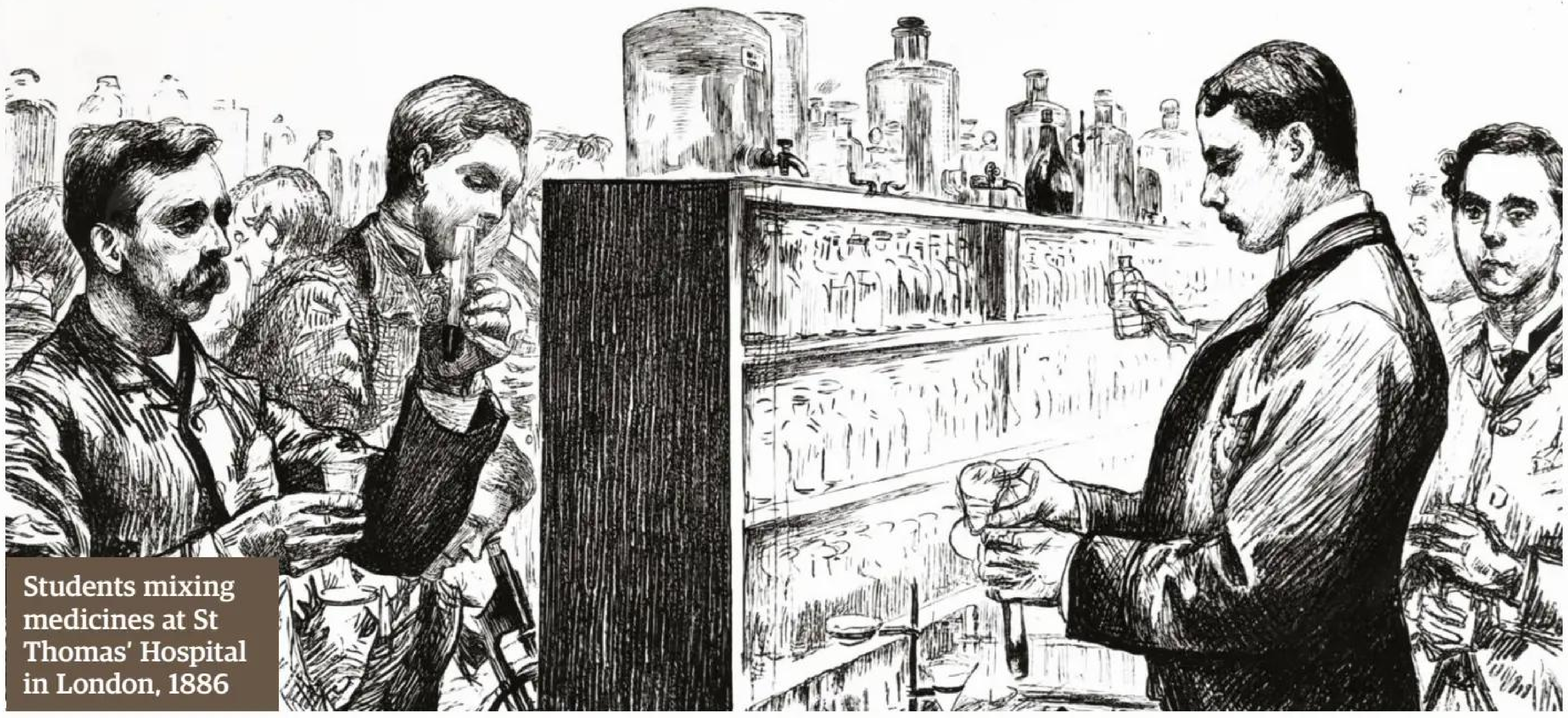

Women attending an anatomy class at the Medical College for Women in New York

hands of surgical staff, and used solutions of carbolic acid spray to reduce the level of germs in the air around the patient, on their skin and in their surgical wounds. While some of Lister's contemporaries were sceptical, by the end of the 19th century antisepsis was widely accepted and implemented. Indeed, Lister is now probably the most famous man in the history of British medicine. He was president of the Royal Society between 1895 and 1900, was raised to the peerage in 1897 and is one of only two surgeons in the United Kingdom with a dedicated public monument. After his death in 1912, his funeral service was held at Westminster Abbey.

Pioneering women

The other major change to the medical profession that took place over the course of the 19th century was that women started to become doctors. While women had long worked as healers, nurses and midwives, it was in the Victorian age that they started entering the regulated medical profession. This charge was led by three trail-blazing women – Elizabeth Blackwell, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and Sophia Jex-Blake – who all struggled to find their place in a male-dominated field. Jex-Blake was described by writer Oliva Campbell as "big and brash, a stout, feisty educational reformer with large eyes and an even larger personality." Garrett Anderson was similarly persistent, but also eloquent, educated and polite.

All three women had to resort to crafty means to achieve their medical qualifications. While British, Blackwell could only attend medical school in the United States. Garrett Anderson only qualified via a loophole in the admissions policy of the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries. And Jex-Blake's attempt to sit an anatomy exam in Edinburgh was met with a literal riot. These women encountered staunch resistance from both the public and the medical profession. There was opposition to their medical education and training (and particularly to the prospect of mixed-sex classes), to them taking up public appointments, and becoming members of professional societies. Although Jex-Blake and her peers enrolled at the University of Edinburgh, they were later denied the right to graduate. The British Medical Association did not accept women until 1892 (barring an oversight that led to Garrett Anderson's admission), and in 1895 both the Royal College of Surgeons of England and


Students mixing medicines at St Thomas' Hospital in London, 1886

All images: © Getty Images, © Shutterstock

WOMEN IN THE FIELD

The pioneering doctors who broke into the male-dominated profession

ELIZABETH BLACKWELL

1821 – 1910

Blackwell is considered to be the first modern woman doctor of medicine, having graduated top of her class from Geneva Medical College in Geneva, New York, in 1849. She worked at St Bartholomew's Hospital in England and then returned to the US to open her own dispensary before helping in the Union's Civil War effort from 1861, organising the Woman's Central Association of Relief and US Sanitary Commission. She returned to England to open a private practice from 1869.

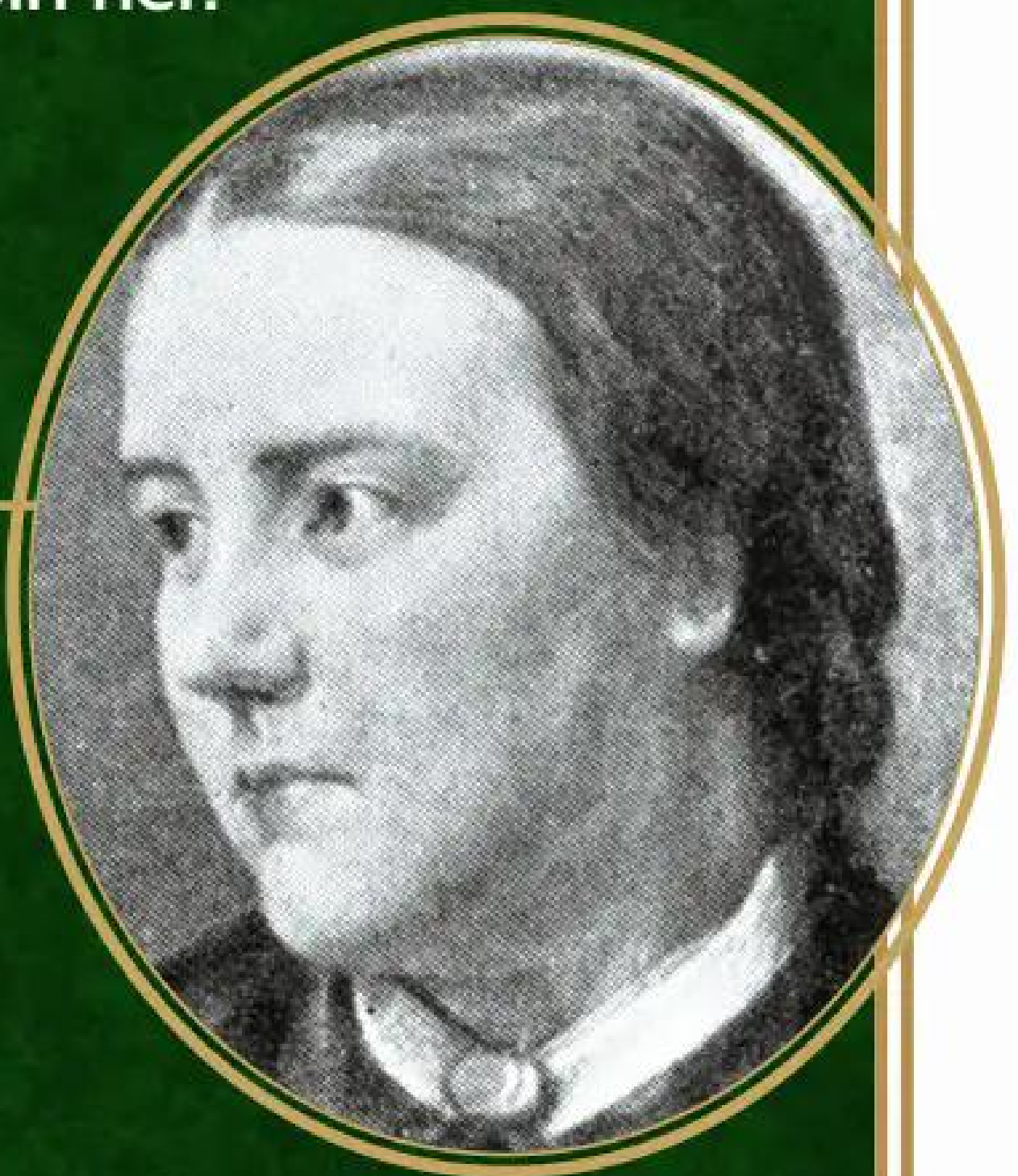
ELIZABETH GARRETT ANDERSON

1836 – 1917

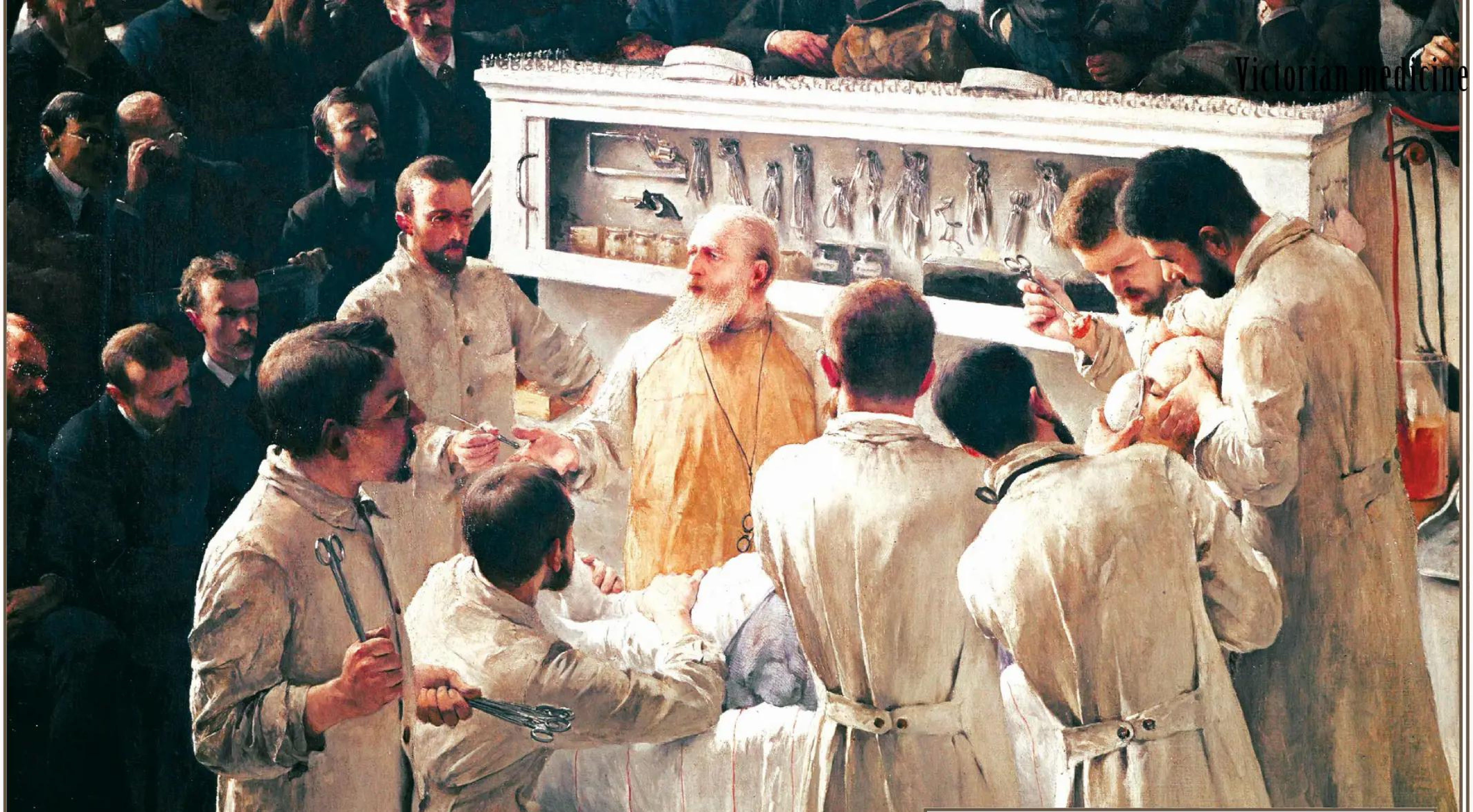
Anderson was the first woman to qualify as a doctor in England, passing the Society of Apothecaries examination in 1865 despite being barred from attending classes with male colleague. She'd been inspired to become a doctor by Elizabeth Blackwell. She taught herself French to earn a medical degree in Paris and set up the New Hospital for Women at St Mary's Dispensary in 1872, hiring Blackwell to join her.

SOPHIA JEX-BLAKE

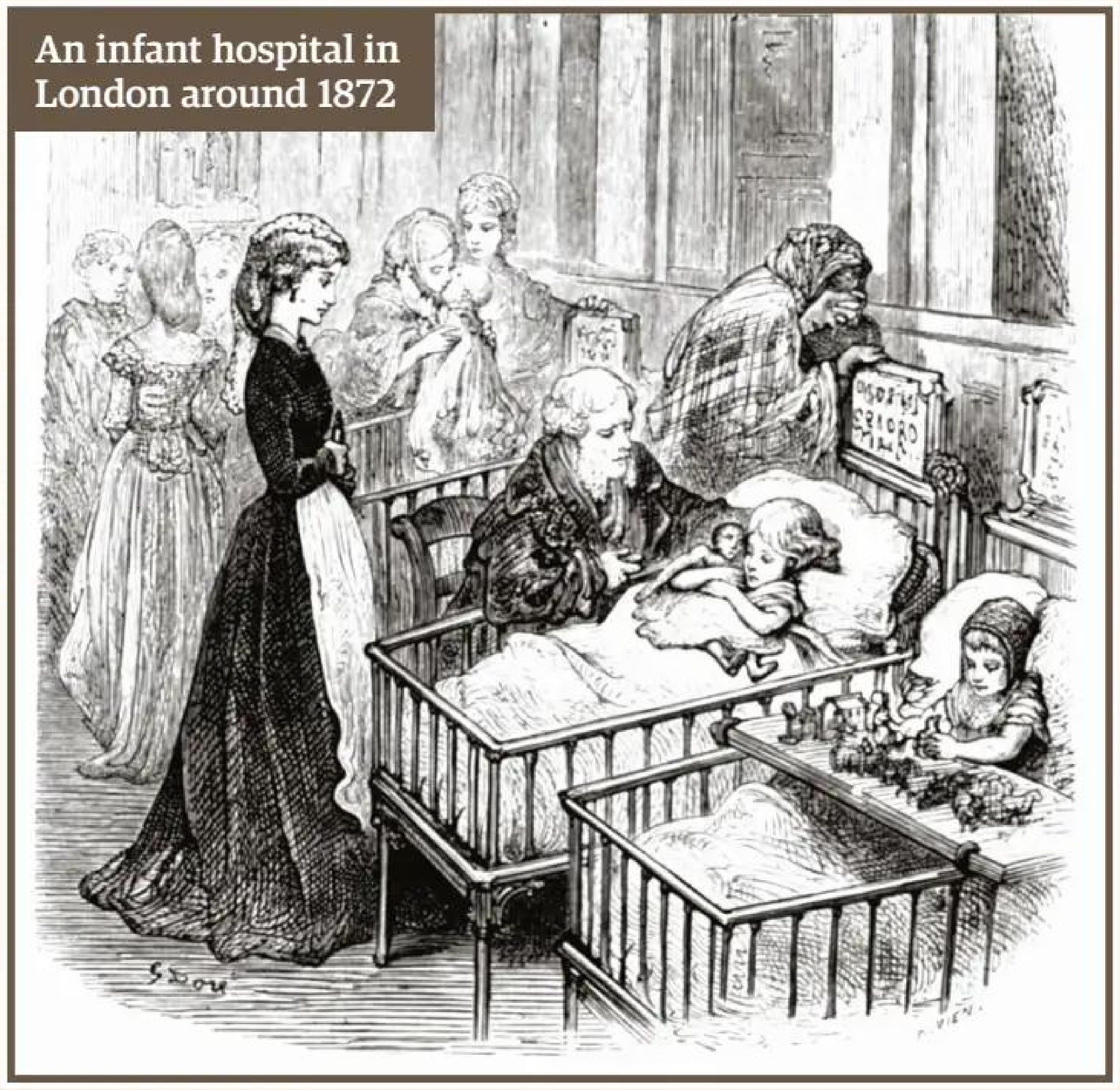
1840 – 1912



Jex-Blake's significant contribution to the advancement of women in medicine was successfully petitioning for legislation in Britain to permit women to receive medical degrees and licences to practice. She had studied in London and Boston before attending medical classes in Edinburgh, but was blocked from taking the degree. She got her degree instead at the University of Bern, Switzerland, in 1877, followed by a licence to practice in Britain, becoming the first practising female doctor in Scotland.



Professor Theodor Billroth lectures on surgery in Vienna, 1880



An infant hospital in London around 1872

WITH THE INTRODUCTION OF ANAESTHESIA, SURGERY BECAME A LESS DAUNTING UNDERTAKING FOR BOTH DOCTOR AND PATIENT

the Royal College of Physicians of London voted against admitting women – decisions that were not overturned until 1908.

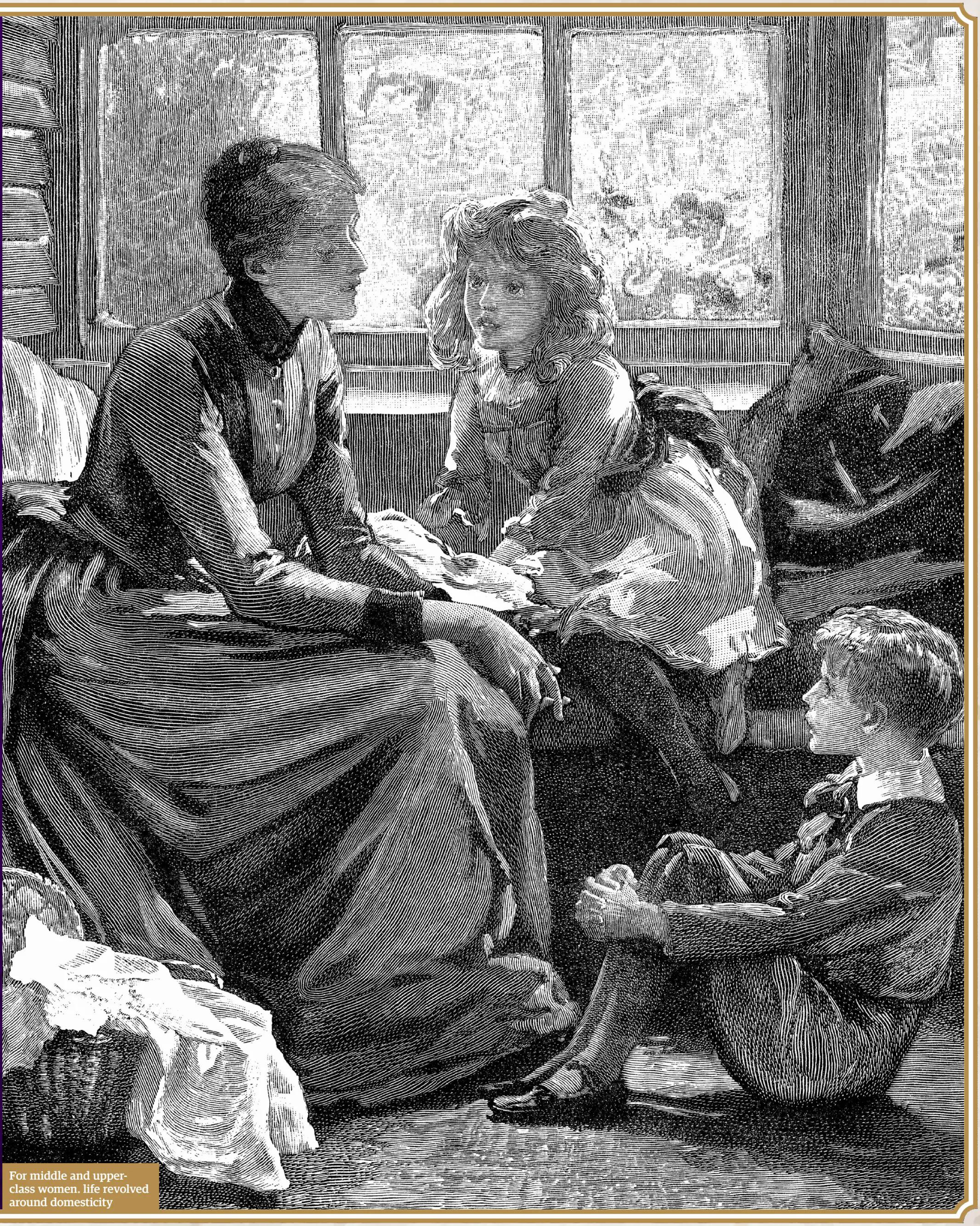
However, while women in general, and these three heroines in particular, faced many obstacles, ultimately their collective efforts proved successful. In 1876, legislation authorised universities to award medical degrees to women, but did not force them to. A year later, the King's and Queen's College of Physicians of Ireland – then one of Britain's 19 medical licensing bodies – opened its final examinations to women. By 1892, there were 135 female physicians on the medical register. They found work in hospitals and dispensaries for women and children across the British Empire. The number of female doctors grew more rapidly after 1900. In 1910, the Royal Society of Medicine and the Royal College of Surgeons of England each elected their first women, followed by the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh in 1920 and the Royal College of Physicians in 1934.

Ultimately, the story about Liston is probably entirely fictional. Medicine in the early 19th century was never as barbarous or cruel as such tales make it out to be. However, it was very different to the medicine we know and use today. Over the course of Queen Victoria's reign medical ideas, the treatments available to people and the professionals who provided care to the masses underwent a radical transformation. By the end of the century, scientists knew about germs, and surgeons were able to numb the pain of operations and prevent the infection of wounds. Doctors understood how many diseases were caused and could be avoided, and both men and women practiced medicine in hospitals that were largely clean and safe. But there was still a long way to go. It would be another 40 years before chemotherapies for cancer were first developed and before antibiotics were invented and widely used. And while women now make up more than half of doctors in the United Kingdom, women in medicine still face discrimination and opposition. Medicine is constantly evolving, and we have little idea what changes are yet to come.

The Birth of SUFFRAGE

Discover how everyday life for Victorian women created a catalyst for the first women's rights movements

Written by Emily Staniforth



For middle and upper-class women. life revolved around domesticity

© Getty; Alamy

Victorian Britain is well remembered for the strict societal rules and regulations imposed on all people, and is often characterised by the stringent and prudish attitude towards impropriety, scandal and sex. For women during this period, these conditions were particularly strict, and overstepping societal boundaries could result in a variety of horrendous punishments. However, the Victorian era was also a time of change and evolution across all levels of society, and this was also true for women. By the end of the 19th century going into the 20th, women were beginning to stand up for themselves and for their right to be heard. But where did this confidence come from? To find out, it is important to understand the restrictions that were imposed on women throughout the 1800s.

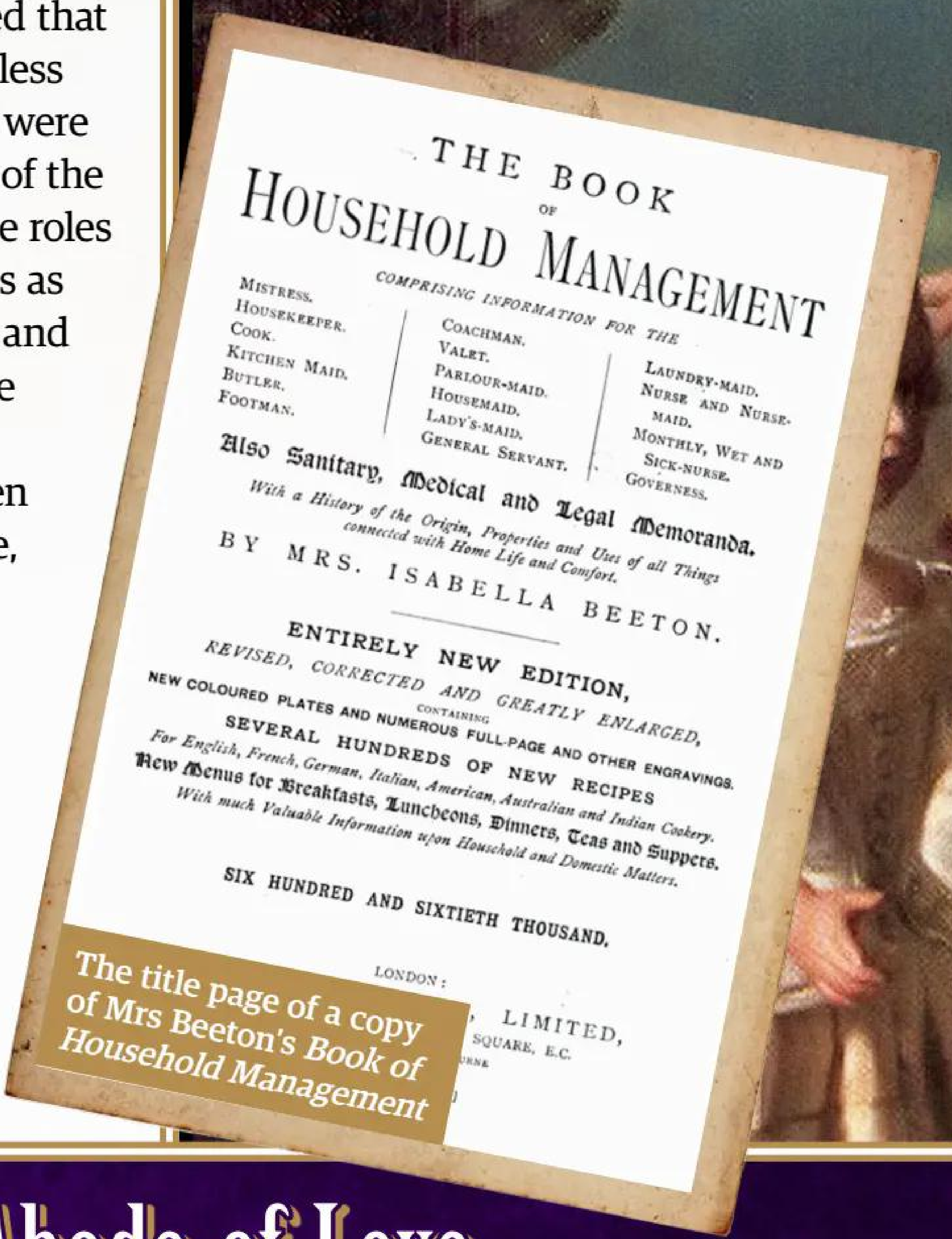
Women in Victorian Britain

Historically, British women have always been viewed by wider society to be subordinate to men. Nevertheless, traditional gender roles for men and women were arguably at their height during the Victorian era. Before the Victorians, it was not unheard of for women to work alongside their families or enter into an occupation themselves. Under the Victorians, a woman's role became firmly established in the home. Finding a good husband, raising a family and taking care of the day-to-day running of the household were believed to be the domain of a woman, and should be what she strived to achieve. Men became the sole breadwinners of the family unit and thus had more control over their spouses. Without work or responsibilities outside of the home, women became completely separated from the wider world. Historians have referred to men and women in this period inhabiting "separate spheres".

But why did the Victorian era see women more marginalised than they had been before, and where did these stereotypes of women as homemakers come from? One of the major causes behind the increased separation of women and men at this time was the widespread and intense industrialisation of Britain. Labouring in factories became the norm for male occupations, and life became more urban as opposed to the largely rural way of life that had preceded it. It was viewed that female characteristics and sensitivities were less suited to this type of work and lifestyle, and were instead more adept to life at home. The idea of the wider rift between expected male and female roles became ingrained in Victorian societal values as a result, and writers, philosophers, scientists and politicians helped to perpetuate the "separate spheres" way of thinking.

The conversation around the role of women came to embed the image of the perfect wife, mother and homemaker into the national consciousness, with women themselves promoting this view. Books like Mrs Beeton's *Book of Household Management*, an instruction manual on how to run the perfect Victorian home written by Isabella Beeton, became a bestseller for decades. The appearance and running of a household came to be a great source of pride or shame for the average upper-class

Queen Victoria ensured the public image of her was of a wife and a mother


THE BOOK
OF
HOUSEHOLD MANAGEMENT
COMPRISING INFORMATION FOR THE

MISTRESS. HOUSEKEEPER. COOK. KITCHEN MAID. BUTLER. FOOTMAN.	COACHMAN. VALET. PARLOUR-MAID. HOUSEMAID. LADY'S-MAID. GENERAL SERVANT.	LAUNDRY-MAID. NURSE AND NURSE-MAID. MONTHLY, WET AND SICK-NURSE. GOVERNESS.

Also Sanitary, Medical and Legal Memoranda.
With a History of the Origin, Properties and Uses of all Things connected with Home Life and Comfort.
BY MRS. ISABELLA BEETON.

ENTIRELY NEW EDITION,
REVISED, CORRECTED AND GREATLY ENLARGED,
CONTAINING
NEW COLOURED PLATES AND NUMEROUS FULL-PAGE AND OTHER ENGRAVINGS.
SEVERAL HUNDREDS OF NEW RECIPES
For English, French, German, Italian, American, Australian and Indian Cookery.
New Menus for Breakfasts, Luncheons, Dinners, Teas and Suppers.
With much Valuable Information upon Household and Domestic Matters.

SIX HUNDRED AND SIXTIETH THOUSAND.

LONDON:
LIMITED,
SQUARE, E.C.

The title page of a copy of Mrs Beeton's *Book of Household Management*

Working-class women who had to work tended to become domestic servants

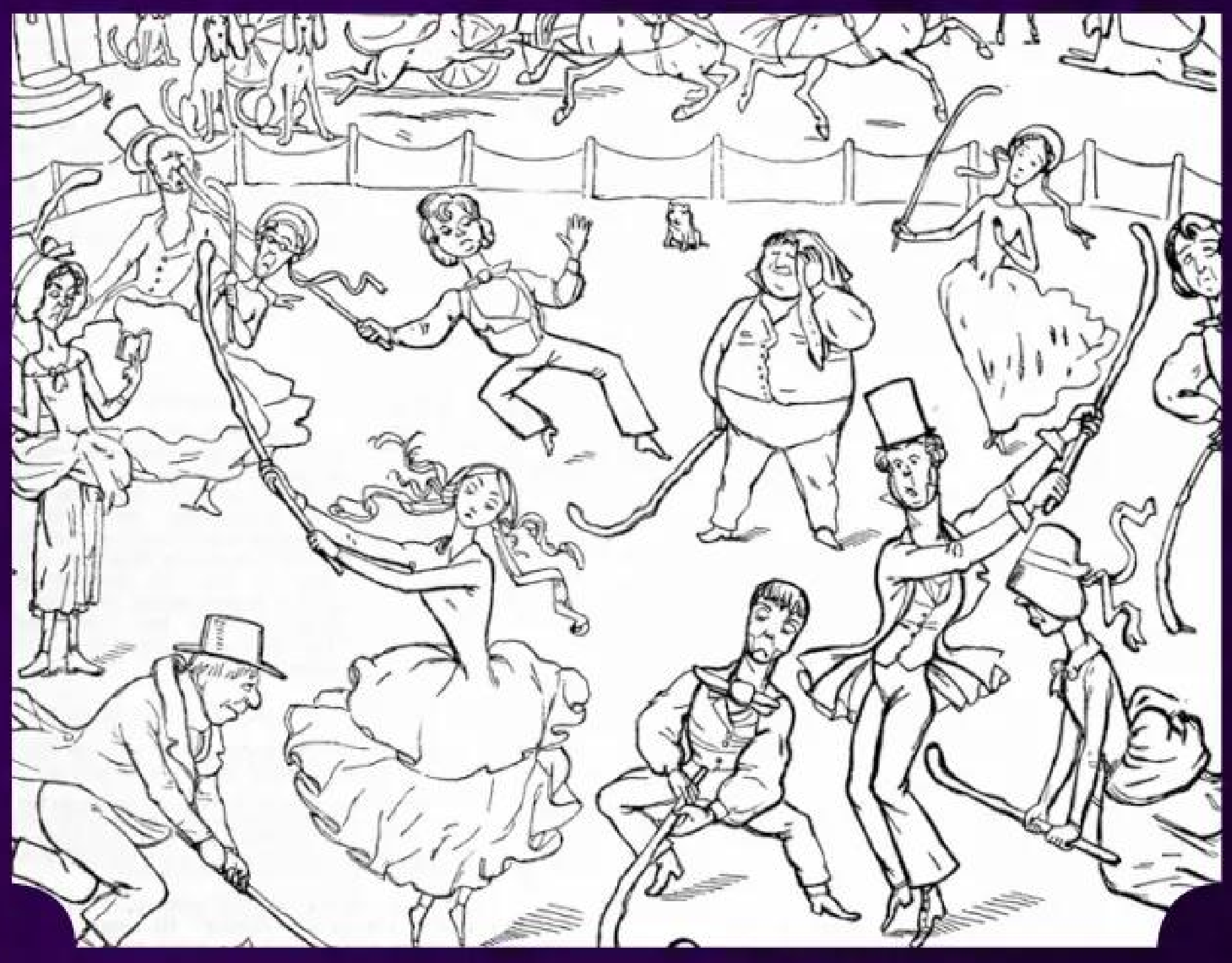
© Getty; Alamy

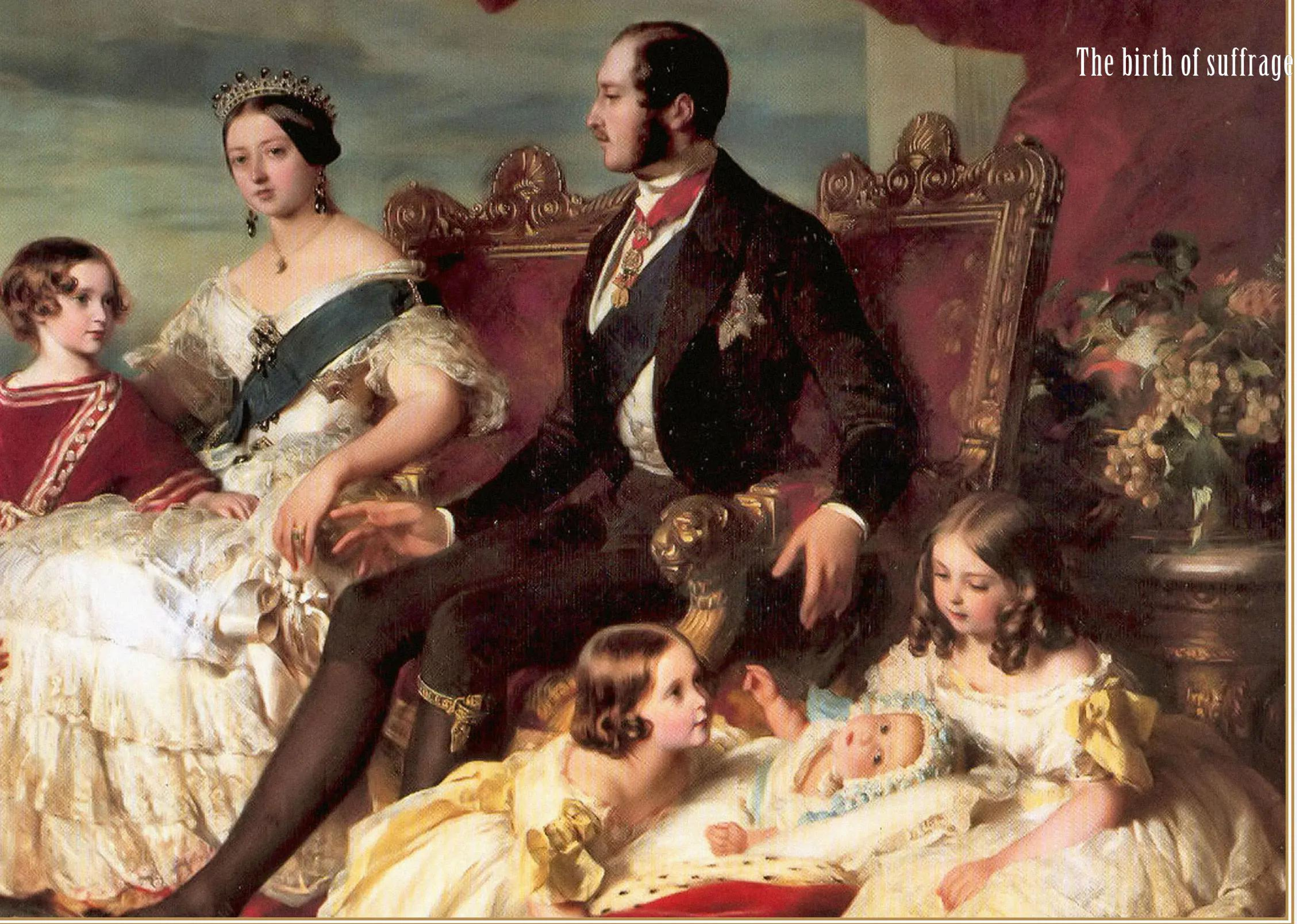
The Abode of Love

How were women treated in a Victorian cult?

In 1846, a mysterious and misogynistic cult was founded in Somerset. The Agapemonites, meaning "of the abode of love" in Greek were followers of the preacher Henry James Prince. Prince was a charismatic preacher, garnering a group of followers even before he was ordained as a priest. He worked for a while as a curate in Charlinch, Somerset, before he had his licence to preach taken away by the Bishop of Bath and Wells who did not like his unconventional style. Nevertheless, Prince continued to gain followers and established a community at Spaxton. Within this community, much of the population was made up by rich, unmarried women. These women funded the lifestyle of Prince and the luxury and comfort at Spaxton, with the community's wealth coming from the female followers.

Within the group, women were allegedly enthralled to Prince, both spiritually and financially. One particular incident saw the family of Louisa Nottidge, a female follower of Prince, "rescue" her from Spaxton and when she continued to speak of her belief in Prince as the messiah, her mother had Louisa committed to a lunatic asylum. Prince himself took several of the female Agapemonites as his "spiritual brides". These marriages were claimed to be celibate, but some of Prince's brides gave birth to children, proving that they were not. On one shocking occasion, Prince engaged in public sexual intercourse with a follower named Zoe, calling the event the Great Manifestation. In this act, he told his followers that he was a vessel for the Holy Spirit. Prince died in 1899, but the community survived for a while under a second leader.


Female followers of the Abode of Love were married to Prince as his "spiritual brides"



Victorian woman, who judged herself and others on their standards of domesticity.

Of course, this stereotype and expectation of women as housewives was not always possible, with many lower class women not able to afford to remain at home and embody the Victorian womanly ideal. It is estimated that during the 19th century, around a third of the female population were in some form of employment. In accordance with the conventional image of a woman's capabilities and tendencies, domestic work came to be populated by working-class women needing to provide financially for their families. This type of work was often hard and laborious, but poorly paid due to women being valued less than their male counterparts (often butlers and footmen).

Morality also came to play a prominent role in the lives of Victorian women, as emphasis was placed on virtue and respectability. Women tended to get married at a young age, typically in their early 20s, while men were, on average, around five years older than their brides. It was expected that young women would not have had any sexual encounters prior to their marriage, mainly because women were believed to be unconcerned with sexual desire and more naturally inclined towards moral principles and religion. For men, on the other hand, matters of virginity before marriage were not quite as important. Once married, a woman would be expected to remain chaste and loyal to her husband. However, it was not unheard of for a married man to engage in extramarital affairs and to purchase the services of prostitutes. As a result, sexually transmitted diseases like syphilis were sometimes passed from a husband to his wife.

> "During the 19th century, around a third of the female population were in some form of employment"

Queen Victoria

It may seem surprising that the roles of women were so confined in Britain at a time when a strong-willed and opinionated woman sat on the throne. By the end of her reign, Queen Victoria was the longest ruling monarch in British history (her record was later beaten by her great-great-granddaughter Queen Elizabeth II), having reigned for over 63 years. During this time, she did little to improve the lot of British women. Despite being a woman in a position of immense power, Victoria did not believe in women's rights and certainly was not a feminist.

In public, Victoria made an effort to promote the image of herself as a wife and mother. In many ways she became the poster girl for the ideal Victorian woman: a true picture of femininity, domesticity and respectability. Her marriage to Albert was idolised and they were considered the perfect couple. With him she had nine children, an impressive number that exemplified the image of a committed mother. Infamously, Victoria was not at all fond of being pregnant or childbearing, though the number of children she had goes some way to highlighting the power female ideals had on even those in the most fortunate positions.

When Albert tragically died in 1861 it is well known that Victoria shunned public engagements, shrouding herself in grief and mourning for the remainder of her life. For over ten years, she essentially removed herself from many aspects of her role as monarch, instead dedicating herself to the memory of her husband. When she did step back into the public eye, Victoria continued to wear black – an ever present acknowledgement of her position as wife to her late husband. The wearing of black mourning clothes was what was expected of all grieving Victorian women, but the extent to which Victoria committed to this expectation was extreme. If her role as monarch had ever contradicted the way she presented herself as the perfect, submissive, dependent Victorian woman, it certainly did after Albert's death.

Throughout her reign, the voices of women started to become louder, with the suffrage movement taking root in Britain during her tenure as queen. Clearly aware of the issues that faced her subjects, she too was aware of the growing campaign for women's rights. Having spent her reign symbolising the epitome of domestic womanhood, Victoria was not going to lend her support to a cause that contradicted her lifestyle. She described the struggle for women's rights as "mad, wicked folly" and never publicly showed her encouragement or backing of the movement. In her own words, Victoria's firm belief was that "God created men and women differently – then let them remain each in their own position."

A tough time

With women confined to the home, separated from society and under the thumb of their husbands, life in the Victorian era could become quite dangerous. Though many women were happy with their domestic duties and lifestyles, their position and lack of a voice did make them vulnerable. Physical abuse such as beatings, and sexual assaults in the form of marital rape were issues that plagued married women during this era. At the beginning of the Victorian period, it was virtually impossible for a woman to divorce her husband, especially on the grounds of abuse. Once married, a Victorian woman essentially gave away her rights in favour of her husband's. It was not until the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act that women had a way of escaping domestic violence within the home.

Though advances were being made to allow women the opportunity to remove themselves from dangerous marriages, there were still many avenues through which men could control their wives and daughters if they were displeased with them. One of the most shocking circumstances a Victorian woman could find herself in was to be sold by her husband. The practice of wife-selling was seen as an alternative to divorce, particularly before the passing of the 1857 Act, for men who wanted to be rid of their wives. Additionally, asylums were always a viable option for men who wanted to shut away women whom they deemed to be overstepping their boundaries. Hysteria was a common diagnosis for women who went against the societal expectations of their sex, and many women were put away when it is likely they had no mental illness.

Baby farming was also a practice that victimised women when they were left with no alternatives. Women often had no control over their own bodies and the number of children they had, and some mothers had to make horrendous decisions about selling, abandoning, or even in some extreme cases, killing their own babies in order to survive. In cases of illegitimate children, there were no legal requirements for a father to take responsibility for their offspring. Therefore, women who could not afford to raise a child by themselves were often faced with a conundrum. In these circumstances, they could pay a baby farmer to take care of their child for them. The best outcome would be that the baby would be adopted by a caring couple who would raise it as their own. However, the system was rife with neglect and trauma, as those who took money for babies did not always give them the care they needed and participated in the practice for profit. Overall, life for Victorian women could be stressful, traumatic and largely out of their control. It is thus unsurprising that some women decided to fight for more rights.

A portrait of Queen Victoria in her later life dressed in mourning clothes

From philanthropy to suffrage

The impetus for change can be traced back to the stringent societal conditions imposed on the women of the Victorian era, and the lack of a political and legal outlet for female frustrations. With women kept within the confines of their domestic sphere, they had no say in anything, from wider societal issues to their own marriage. Harsh treatment, bad pay for those who worked, and a lack of ownership over one's own life could all be viewed as contributing factors to the beginning of women's suffrage. Furthermore, for women in Britain, the irony of being ruled over by a queen while having no political rights of their own did not go unnoticed.

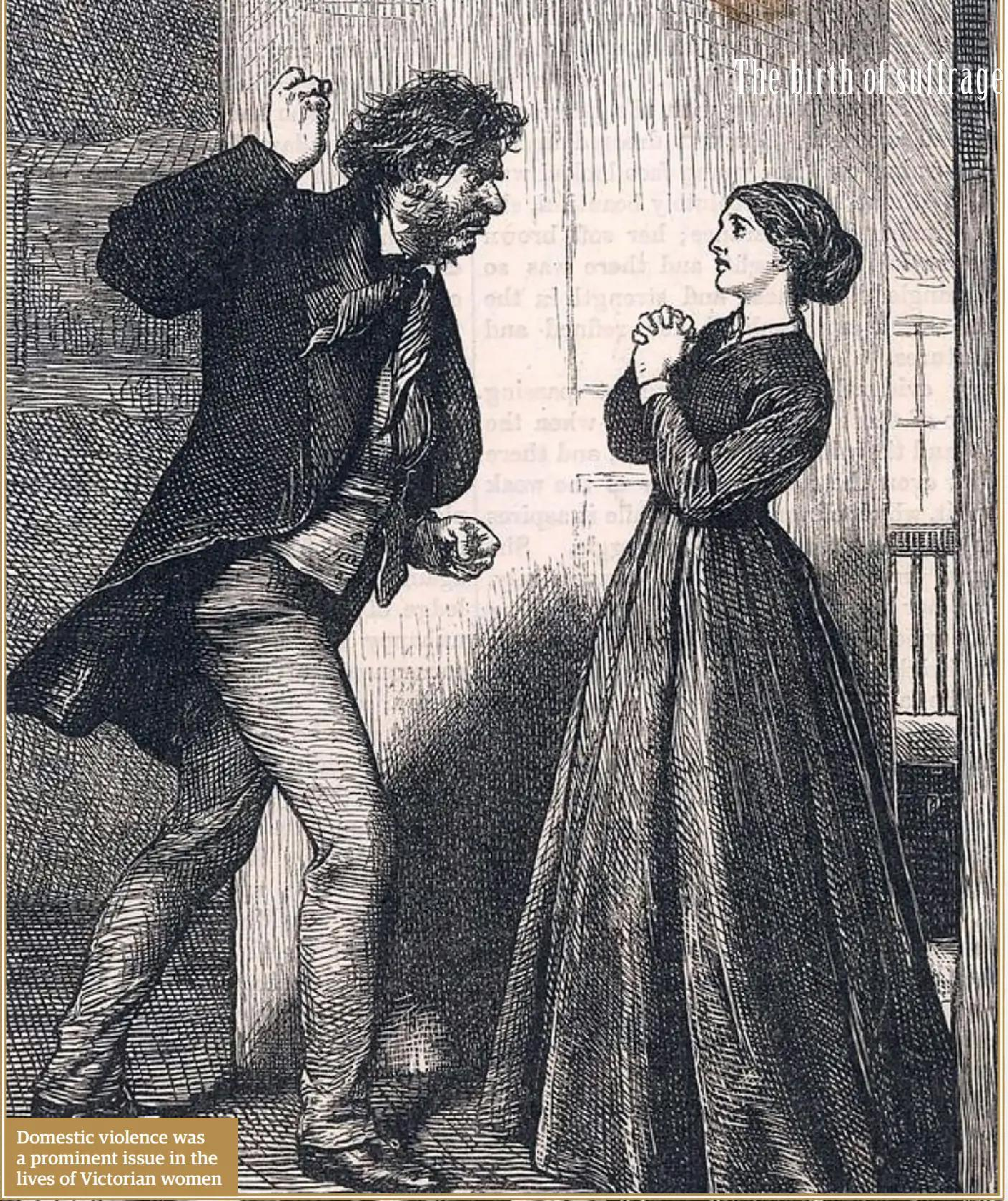
In an early effort to assert their own agency in society, a number of upper and middle-class women began to look for ways they could help others. Fully committed to their roles as homemakers, wealthier Victorian women made the decision to help women who may be struggling to fulfil their role in society, specifically women who were living in poverty. Philanthropy, particularly helping other women and children, became a worthy pursuit for women who had the time, and began to show women that they were able to enact change. This type of work made women think about their place in society and gave them the confidence to start questioning their rights – many of Victorian England's early feminists had their roots in charity work. As a result, the movement for women's rights started to gain momentum.

In 1848, the first women's rights convention in the USA was held in Seneca Falls. Organised by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, the convention was the first step towards the campaign for women's equal voting rights, also known as suffrage. It would not be until 20 years later that the first public meeting concerning the rights of women would be held in England. The Manchester National Society for Women's Suffrage (MNSWS) had been established in 1867, as had its London counterpart, and organised its first public gathering in 1868. There, women spoke publicly and freely about the issues they faced and the change they wanted to see.

Two years prior, a petition had been presented to John Stuart Mill and Henry Fawcett, both Members of Parliament who had voiced their support for equal political rights for all, demanding that women should be allowed to vote. Mill put the proposition to parliament but it was voted against, inspiring women around Britain to set up organisations like the MNSWS. The fight for suffrage had begun.

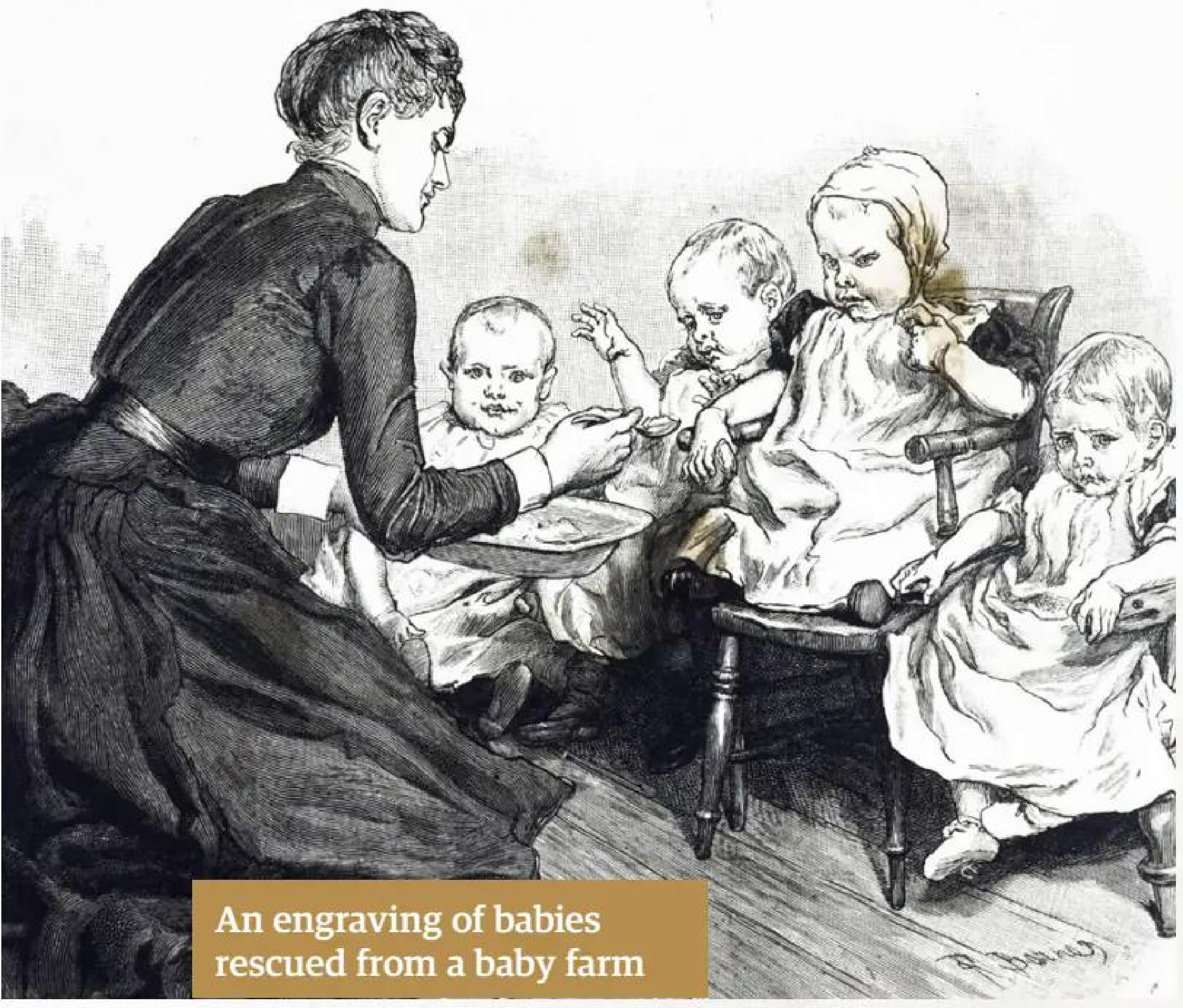
For the remainder of the Victorian period, women campaigned for suffrage through a plethora of political activities. Advancements were seen in the implementation of education for girls in 1870 and the 1882 Married Woman's Act which granted women more property rights. However, the ultimate goal was yet to be attained.

In 1897, all the disparate suffrage groups in Britain came together to establish themselves as a unified and determined organisation. Led by Millicent Fawcett, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) set out to prove that women deserved the vote in a peaceful manner. Though it would be years before the ambition of the NUWSS was realised, the foundations for the suffrage movement were well established before the death of Queen Victoria in 1901. Entering a new age, the women who fought for suffrage came to be known as the Suffragettes, and some of their methods became more militant. Women like Emily Wilding Davison sacrificed their own lives for the advancement of women's suffrage, while others were arrested, participated in hunger strikes and demonstrated until the vote was finally granted in November 1918.



Domestic violence was a prominent issue in the lives of Victorian women

> "Overall, life for Victorian women could be stressful, traumatic and largely out of their control"



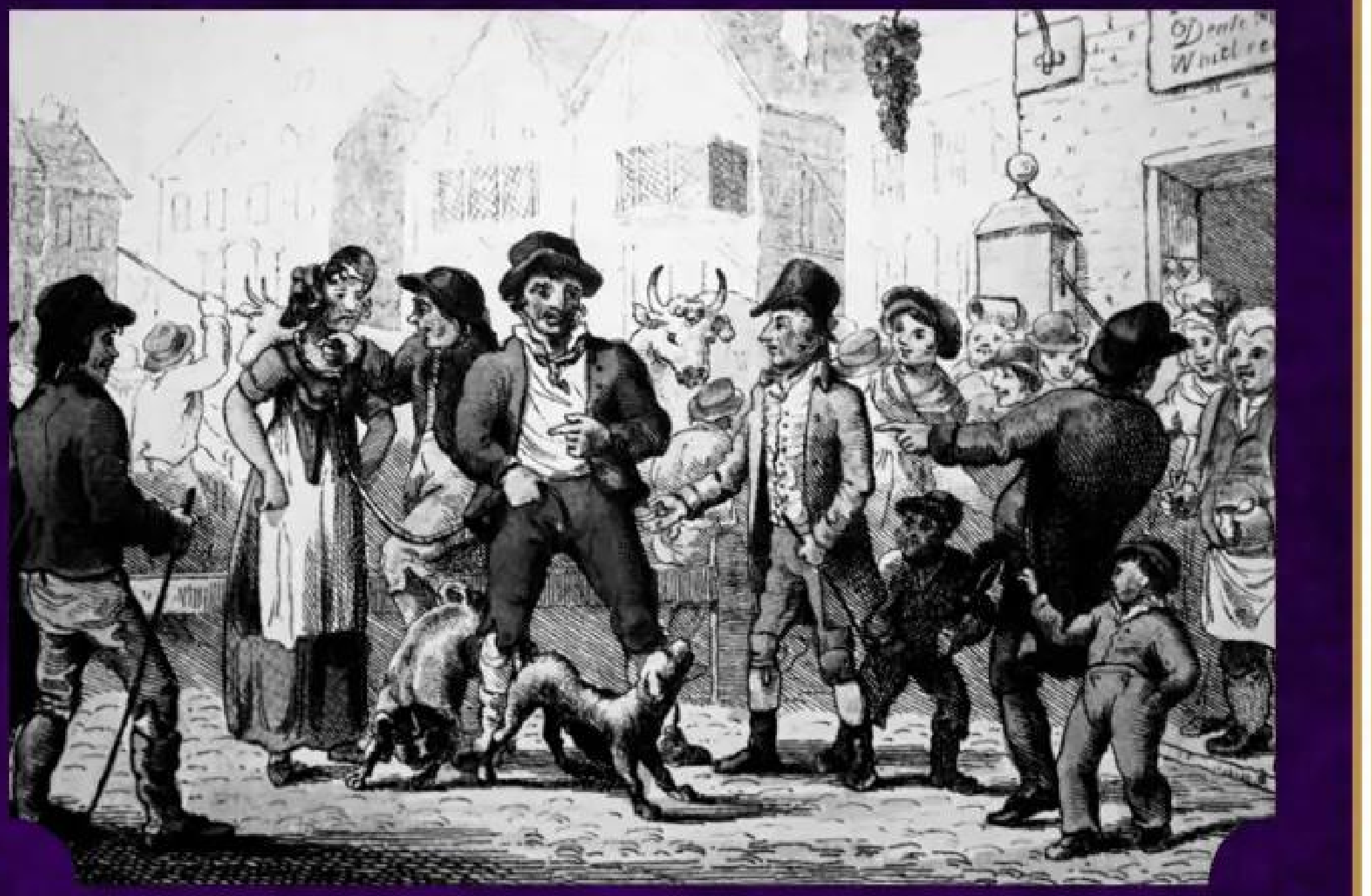
An engraving of babies rescued from a baby farm

The practice of wife-selling

How could a man sell his wife and what did it mean?

Possibly having started in around 1550, wife-selling as a method of publicly separating from a spouse continued to happen in British society until the early 20th century, though by this time the practice appears to have occurred largely in the north of England, particularly Yorkshire. By selling a wife, with witnesses to the transaction, it was accepted by society that the marriage had officially ended. These sales could happen in a public auction, a public sale or a private sale. Public sales and auctions were largely symbolic, and most of the time a buyer had already been settled upon. Sometimes, if a woman had participated in an affair, she was sold to the man she had been having an intimate relationship with.

Though men could instigate the selling of a wife, the wife had to agree to the sale. This could be a positive event for a wife – she could be freed from her first marriage and her husband would no longer have the rights to any of her possessions. However, the public sales were designed in order for a husband to embarrass and humiliate an unfaithful wife. A woman was also only given the option in a wife sale of being the 'property' of another man, rather than being separated from her first husband and remaining independent.



Wife-selling sometimes took the form of a public auction

© Getty; Alamy

The Ugly Girl Papers

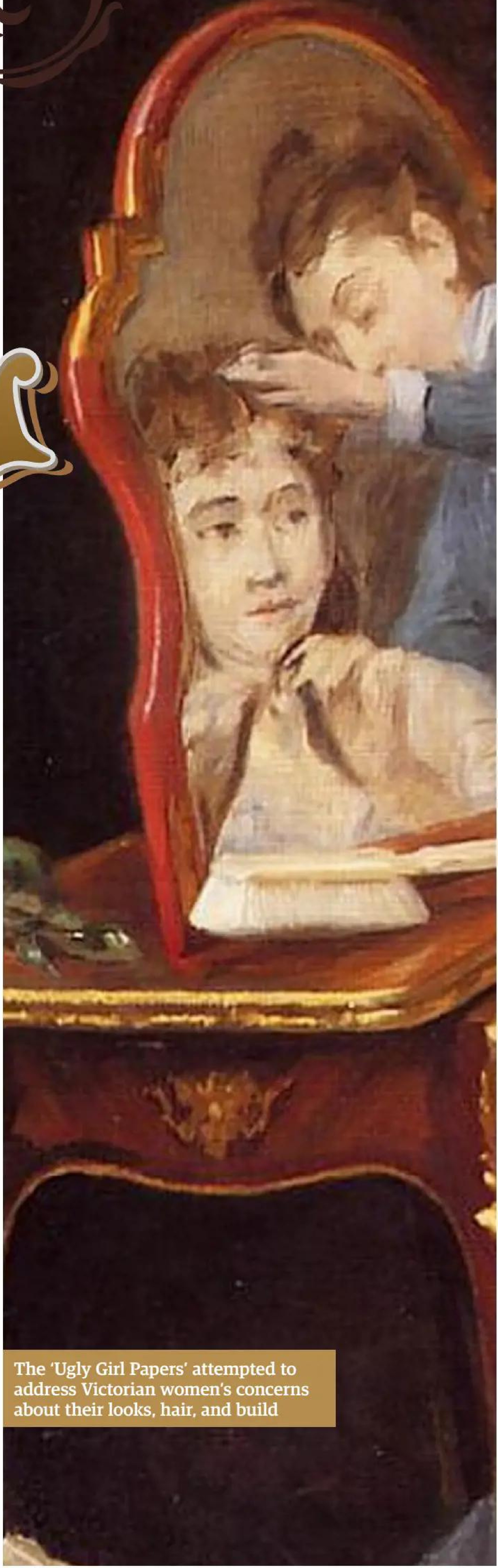
Written by Nell Darby

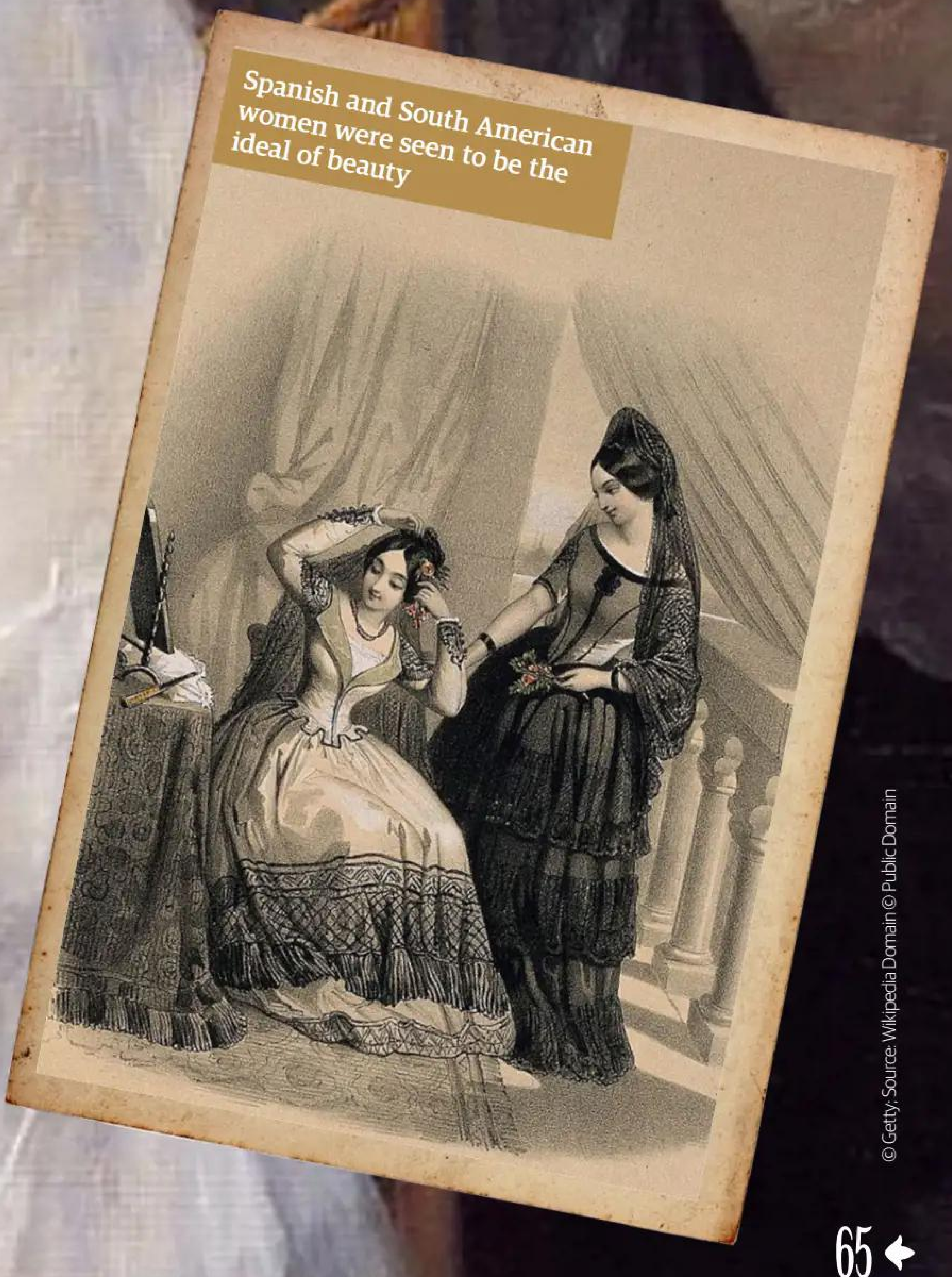
A series of magazine articles in 1870s America aimed to help women avoid ugliness, and achieve beauty – at whatever the cost

Where could you read about how to colour your cheeks, get rid of spots, and emulate the glamour of South American ladies? In the 1870s, the answer was by reading the 'Ugly Girl Papers'.

The 'Ugly Girl Papers' were a series of articles originally published in *Harper's Bazaar* magazine, before becoming a book in 1874. The author gave their name simply as 'SDP'; these were the initials of professional writer Susan Dunning Power. The articles proved very popular with readers, who also submitted their own advice. Women of all ages sought to look as good as possible, and the 'Ugly Girl Papers' sought to enable them to do so.

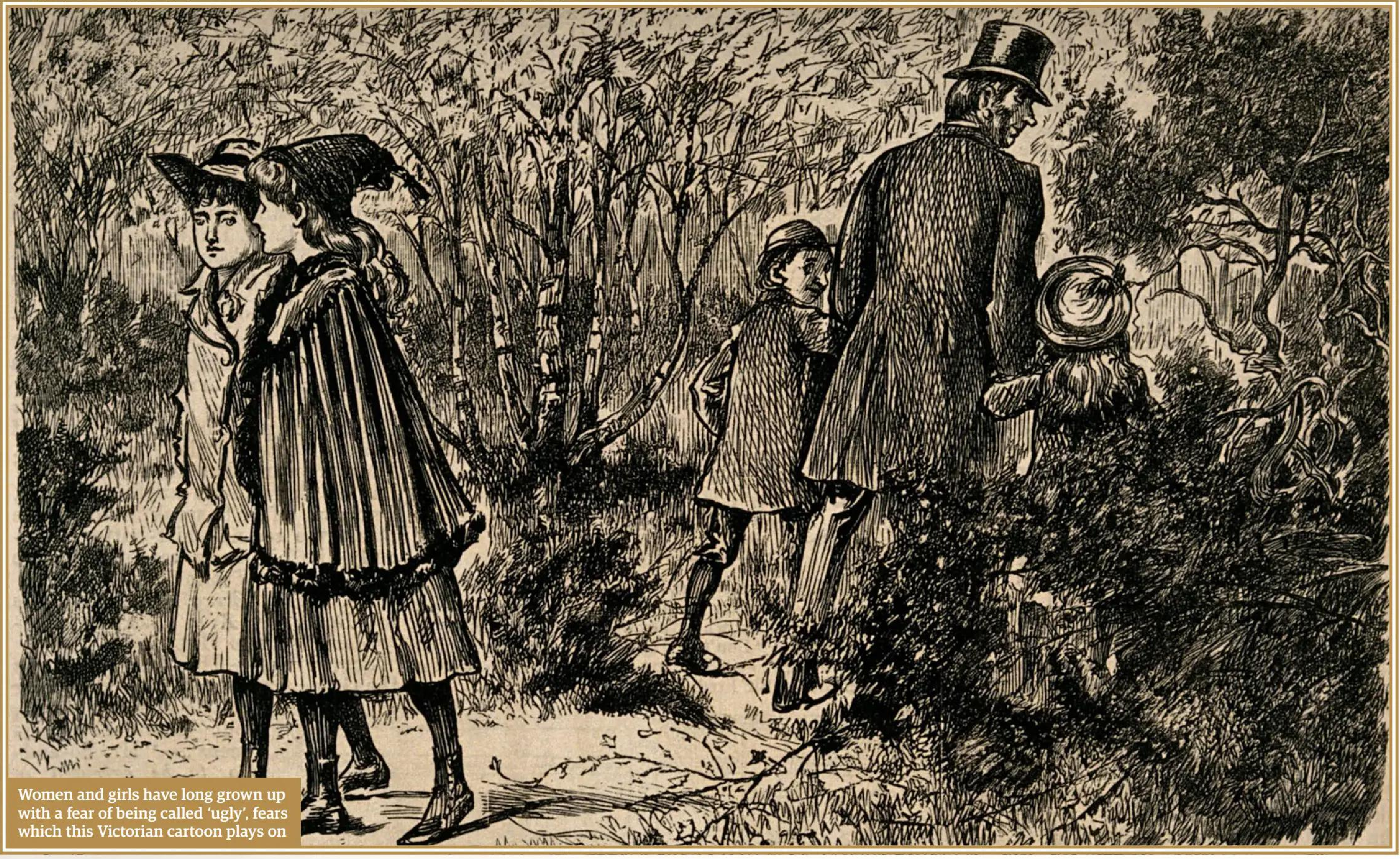
However, the 'Ugly Girl Papers' were not just about physical attractiveness: as well as features on skin and hair, manners, movement and cleanliness were all covered. There were articles about physical health and the 'dangers' of being overweight, mental health, and the benefits of exercise and sleep. Self-confidence was also emphasised, with the Papers noting that "the first requisite in a woman toward pleasing others is that she should be pleased with herself". In other words, if a woman genuinely believed she was beautiful, others would believe she was too, regardless of how old she was. The Papers showed they were of their time, though, with some rather old-fashioned theories: for example, blondes were seen to be prone to freckles and spots, and were encouraged to take a dose of ammonia in water twice a day to help improve their skin.


The 'Ugly Girl Papers' attempted to address Victorian women's concerns about their looks, hair, and build



Spanish and South American women were seen to be the ideal of beauty

© Getty; Source: Wikipedia Domain © Public Domain



Women and girls have long grown up with a fear of being called 'ugly', fears which this Victorian cartoon plays on

Mrs Power and the power of beauty

The 'Ugly Girl Papers' were written by a young American mother

The 'Ugly Girl Papers' were written by Susan Dunning Power, who would later also write a children's guide to etiquette and good manners. Her magazine articles were just part of a long writing career.

At the time of her writing the 'Ugly Girl Papers', she was in her late 20s, and her only child, Andrew, was a toddler. The impact of motherhood and tiredness on her may well have got her thinking about how to look more awake, more youthful and more together, and to investigate methods of 'beautifying' not only herself but other women and girls in the United States as well.

Susan was born Susan Ann Dunning in Indiana, in 1845. Her father, Alva, a Presbyterian minister, was from New York State, and her mother, Ellen, from Boston. She was the eldest of several children. She grew up in Indiana and Wisconsin, and after marrying her husband Felipe, lived in a well-educated household where she was able to write for a variety of publications.

In fact, Susan was writing articles for the *Chicago Tribune* before she reached her teens. Later, she was on the staff of both the Chicago paper and the *New York Tribune*, and also wrote recipes for a Chicago womens' cookbook. Although she used her real initials on the publication of the 'Ugly Girl Papers' in *Harper's Bazaar*, she usually wrote as 'Shirley Dare'.

Susan, who was widowed by 1910, was badly burnt in a house fire in 1922, and tragically died of her injuries.

HARPER'S BAZAR.

Susan Dunning Power wrote the 'Ugly Girl Papers' as a series for *Harper's Bazaar*; its popularity meant it soon became a book

Source: Wikipedia Domain © Public Domain

Susan Dunning Power used her own experiences in the Papers. When highlighting how women should avoid putting on weight, she noted that she had suffered from anxiety several years earlier. She lost her appetite, spending her days working and walking. She would either omit breakfast, or just eat strawberries and "one Graham cracker". Other meals consisted of half an orange or some cherries. Whereas we would see her diet as disordered, she saw it as "resolute denial" – an example that other women should follow. Although she told her readers to never go hungry, she also saw losing weight as worth the effort. Power also encouraged women to eat salad, particularly lettuce, as it apparently contained opium "in its least injurious state" (Lettuce does in fact contain a calming chemical, but fortunately not that one!).

Making up

In the 19th century, make-up was seen as unbecoming for decent young women, and was associated with prostitution and the lower classes. The 'Ugly Girl Papers' noted that artifice was commonly used to make oneself prettier – false hair and artificial shaped nails, painted eyelids and rouge on cheeks were "as old as Thebes" – but emphasised that it was only by using natural products that respectable women should attempted to beautify themselves. Paint and powder were a form of deception; using plants, for example, were not. The slapdash application of any make-up was also criticised, for it would "convey an unpleasant idea of dissipation."

More natural ways of making one's face more attractive could be quite hardcore; for example, one fashionable mother had made her daughter's lips redder and face more magnolia in colour by keeping her on a strict diet of brown bread and syrup. Another made her daughter's cheeks a healthy colour by only feeding her oatmeal porridge. Both approaches were described in the 'Ugly Girl Papers' as being rather "courageous".

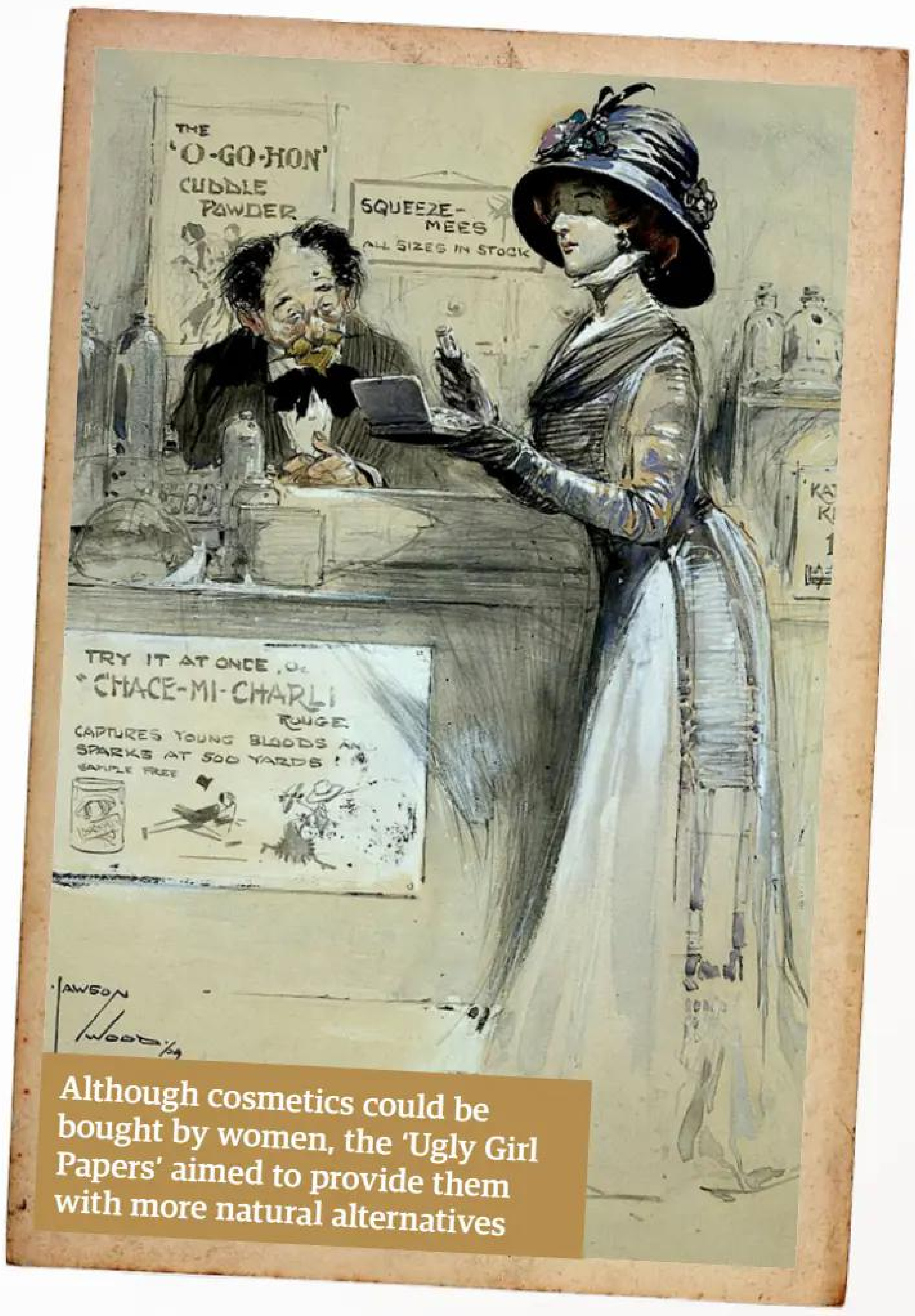
Other natural forms of hair care and make-up were recommended, with no mention of potential side effects. Hair dye to turn the hair black could be made from vinegar, lemon juice and "powdered litharge" (lead oxide). Shop-bought hair removers were seen as unpleasant because they were caustic and could leave the skin hard to the touch – yet moles, and the hairs that could grow out of them, should be removed with "lunar caustic" (silver nitrate). Eyelashes could be encouraged to grow by rubbing in lard mixed with mercury at night.

Hairy remedies

The 'Ugly Girl Papers' stressed that every girl should ideally have waist-length hair, kept in perfect condition. The hair should be trimmed once a month once and be washed daily or twice weekly with ammonia. Blonde hair was undesirable, and girls should be kept out of the sun in order for their hair to darken to "more agreeable shades". Alternatively, as blonde hair was seen as a sign of anaemia, it might darken if individuals ate lots of steak and red wine! Pomades were unacceptable as they were vulgar, and it was only permitted to oil hair if taking a sea bath, in which case, it would protect the hair from salt water – but should be washed off straight after, again with ammonia. The 'Ugly Girl Papers' viewed Spanish and South American women as having the perfect hair, long and thick, and twisted into a coil - in fact, in many ways, they were seen as the antithesis of the 'ugly girl'. The readers of the Papers were encouraged to copy their example by brushing their hair one hundred times a day.

Dangerous and time consuming

The 'Ugly Girl Papers' considered ammonia to be one of the most valuable aids to women's beauty. As well as the uses mentioned above, it was recommended that when a hot bath or a sea bath was not an option, women should use liquid ammonia in a pail of water for an invigorating bath, which would have the same effect as "a plunge in the surf". It could also be used for cleaning the skin, and as a deodorant by cleaning the armpits with a spoonful of ammonia in water every morning. No mention was made of the fact that it could irritate the skin or even burn the airways and lungs if accidentally ingested. Vinegar was likewise a common ingredient given for beauty treatments, and also recommended to bleach wigs to a lighter colour (although wigs were only seen as acceptable for actresses needing hair for theatre productions).

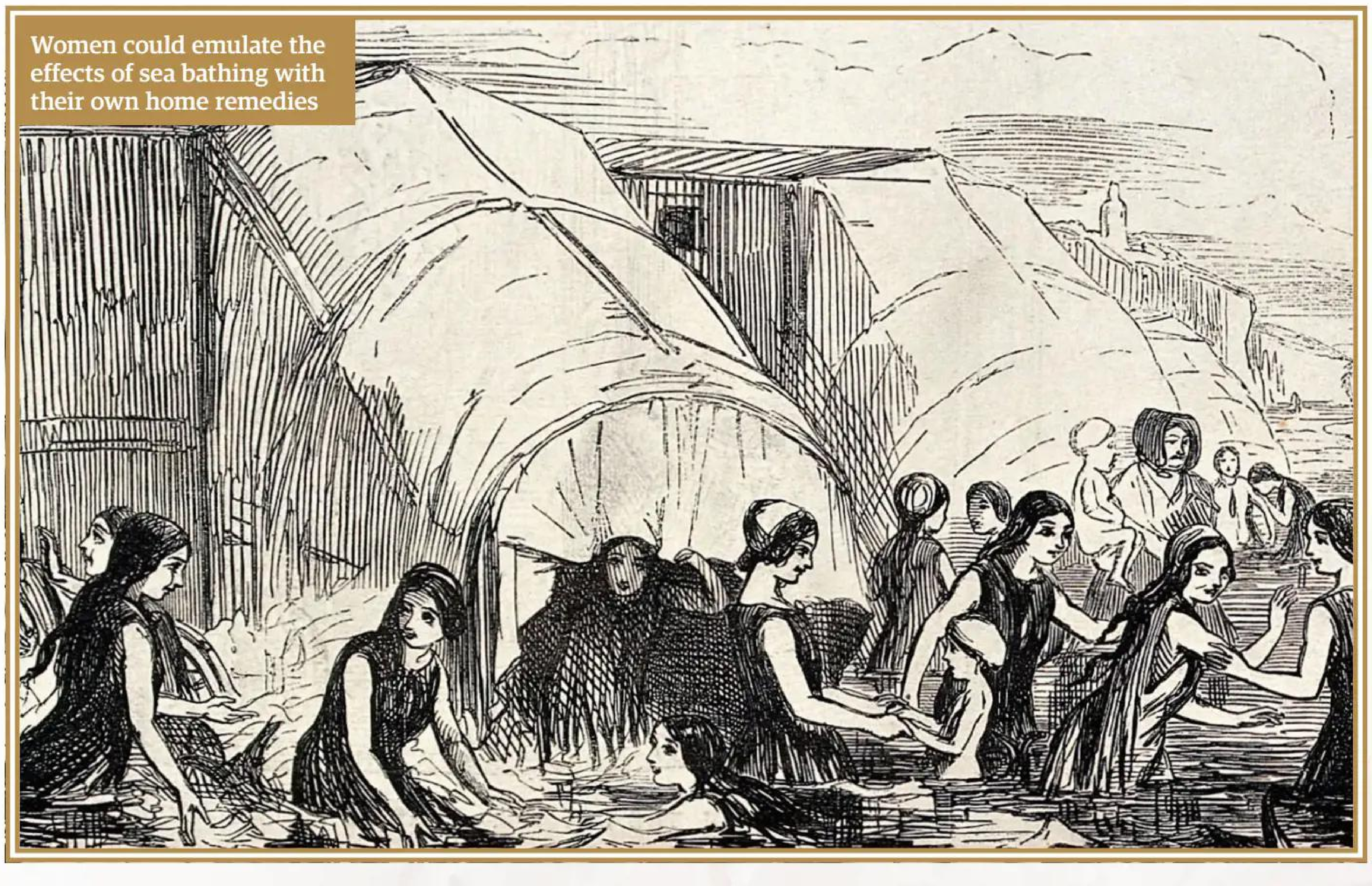

THE 'O-GO-HON' CUDDLE POWDER
SQUEEZE-MEES ALL SIZES IN STOCK
TRY IT AT ONCE
'CHACE-MI-CHARLI' ROUGE
CAPTURES YOUNG BLOODS AT 500 YARDS!
SAMPLE FREE

Although cosmetics could be bought by women, the 'Ugly Girl Papers' aimed to provide them with more natural alternatives

charbon de bois.

Ammonia was recommended in lots of the advice from the 'Ugly Girl Papers'

> "The 'Ugly Girl Papers' considered ammonia to be one of the most valuable aids to women's beauty"



Women could emulate the effects of sea bathing with their own home remedies

Chalk could be used to make face powder; it could be mixed with glycerin or wax from a tallow candle, although this latter was seen as old-fashioned. Such a powder was also recommended as it stopped women getting freckles – but breathing in such dust could have side effects such as headaches or lethargy. Although the 'Ugly Girl Papers' recommended avoiding rouge as it could contain lead or arsenic, its own alternative recipes were time consuming, if not downright odd. Face cleanser could be made from egg white, spread thickly on the face before going to bed, with a handkerchief laid on top to stop the mixture sliding off onto the bedsheets.

Although the 'Ugly Girl Papers' noted some of the dangerous remedies and products that had been used by women previously, it was not averse to recommending its own. Powdered saltpetre was recommended to remove freckles; carbolic acid could help with cuts and ulcers. Those who had been "exposed to low and degraded" people should apply diluted sulphurous acid (a strong preservative) – but if done incorrectly, it could destroy "all parasites, human beings or pets"! Luckily, the 'Ugly Girl Papers' did recommend avoiding using hydrochloric acid as a facewash, as one woman had done, as it could cause blisters.

The Papers were just part of a whole industry devoted to women's beauty by the late 19th century. There were pages of adverts in fashion magazines, and salons where one could receive beauty treatments. The 'Ugly Girl Papers' aimed to enable women to beautify themselves in the privacy of their own home, concocting their own remedies to improve themselves. Yet although they aimed to encourage women to make the most of their natural looks, the name of the papers, and some of the remedies suggested, also made clear that only some types of looks were acceptable.

SEEN & NOT HEARD

For Victorian children, rules were strict and the punishments for breaking them swift, harsh and zealous

Written by April Madden

Children, the Victorian maxim goes, should be seen and not heard. Seen, prettily, with their rosy smiling cheeks, clad in frothy dresses for the girls and smart sailor suits for the boys. But not heard. The occasional tinkle of delighted laughter may be permissible at Christmas or the zoo, a lisping admiration for Queen Victoria or the heroes of the British Empire may be quietly expressed in moments of extreme emotion, but other than that, well-bred children should speak only when spoken to. And those horrid little oiks that the undeserving poor keep breeding shouldn't be spoken to, or even of, at all.

A great summation of the hypocrisy of Victorian child rearing is Charlotte Brontë's 1847 novel *Jane Eyre*. As a child, the unfortunate heroine is told over and over again to be quiet and unobtrusive, yet the adults in her life remark that they'd like her more if she was lively and playful. While being packed off to an institution for unwanted girls, its wealthy, performatively philanthropic benefactor tells young Jane of a poor boy who, given the choice between praying or candy, always opts for the former. Unnoticed by the sanctimoniously oblivious Mr Brocklehurst, the canny urchin has figured out he gets two sweets if he pretends to prefer a psalm instead. Throughout, Brontë deliberately plays with the doublethink at the heart of the Victorian view of children: they are at once both infant angels and little animals, innocent yet corrupted by original sin. These feral cherubim are entirely plastic in nature, and as they are believed to be lacking emotional depth or critical thinking, have to have the precepts of good behaviour and Christian morality beaten and starved into them lest they fall into moral degeneracy. The children of the working classes and 'lower orders' are most at risk of this, but those of the middle and upper classes also require forceful guidance.

Religion is the core of this dichotomy. Although Victorian Britain was a Protestant state, and so nominally followed what is often thought of as a more moderate version of Christianity, the Church of England at the time frequently indulged itself in High Church ritual and doctrine. Along with the neo-medieval art and architecture so beloved by the Victorians came a distinctly old-fashioned, Catholic notion of morality. Children, having been born from the immoral act of sex, were tainted by this original sin. This manifested in bad or transgressive behaviour, a sin against the fifth biblical Commandment to "Honour thy father and thy mother", and the traditional way of purging sin was through 'mortification of the flesh': physical pain, deprivation, and hunger.

Corporal punishment and withholding food were common disciplinary tactics in Victorian child-rearing. Boys and girls were regularly beaten with bamboo canes or hazel switches, sometimes even bundles of twigs, or a leather belt or slipper. Common targets were the hands, legs and bottom,

© Getty; Alamy

or the back of the neck. At boarding schools, this was often formalised into a ritual in which boys were sent to their house master's study in the evening after prep (homework) and beaten for transgressions earlier in the day. 'Six of the best' was a common amount. In a middle or upper-class home, a nanny, nursemaid, tutor or governess might dispense the same, but if it was a parent or a guardian (the high mortality rate meant that a significant proportion of orphaned children were raised by relatives or godparents) or you were unlucky enough to be a member of a large and underfed lower-class family, then the punishment could be significantly worse. Victorian morality tales of violent underclass parents and vicious caregivers abound, and if a naughty child doesn't get their dinner then it means more for the other hungry mouths at the table.

For middle and upper-class children who were raised at home, being sent to bed without their supper wasn't the terrible punishment it was for a poor child. The wealthy Victorian diet featured lots of little meals, and supper in this case was a light snack of bread and butter with honey or jam, and warm milk or cocoa. The child would have already had breakfast and perhaps elevenses, lunch, tea and, if they were old enough, their evening dinner, at least one of which was a full meal made up of multiple courses. Lunch and dinner would often include meat or fish, vegetables, and a heavy dessert. For wealthy children too young to stay up that late (the genteel Victorian dinner was served after 8pm), nursery tea was a substantial one, featuring such niceties as boiled eggs, toasted cheese or sausages, bread or sandwiches, and a plain cake. After such feasts, missing supper wasn't going to leave anyone of means hungry.

For small boys of good family, however, the delights of nursery tea and lessons at home stopped at the age of ten. If a boy was off to one of the old, famous, elite schools like Eton, Charterhouse or Harrow, then he could expect a regime of academic work that prioritised the study of ancient Greek and Latin and included mathematics, divinity (religious education), English, French, perhaps natural history, and an exhausting and highly competitive physical education curriculum. At Eton, Britain's oldest and most famous boarding school, science was only introduced as a regular subject in 1869, while Classics teachers socially outranked those of other subjects and took precedence over them. Here, Victorian-era boarders were split

"Victorian morality tales of violent underclass parents and vicious caregivers abound"

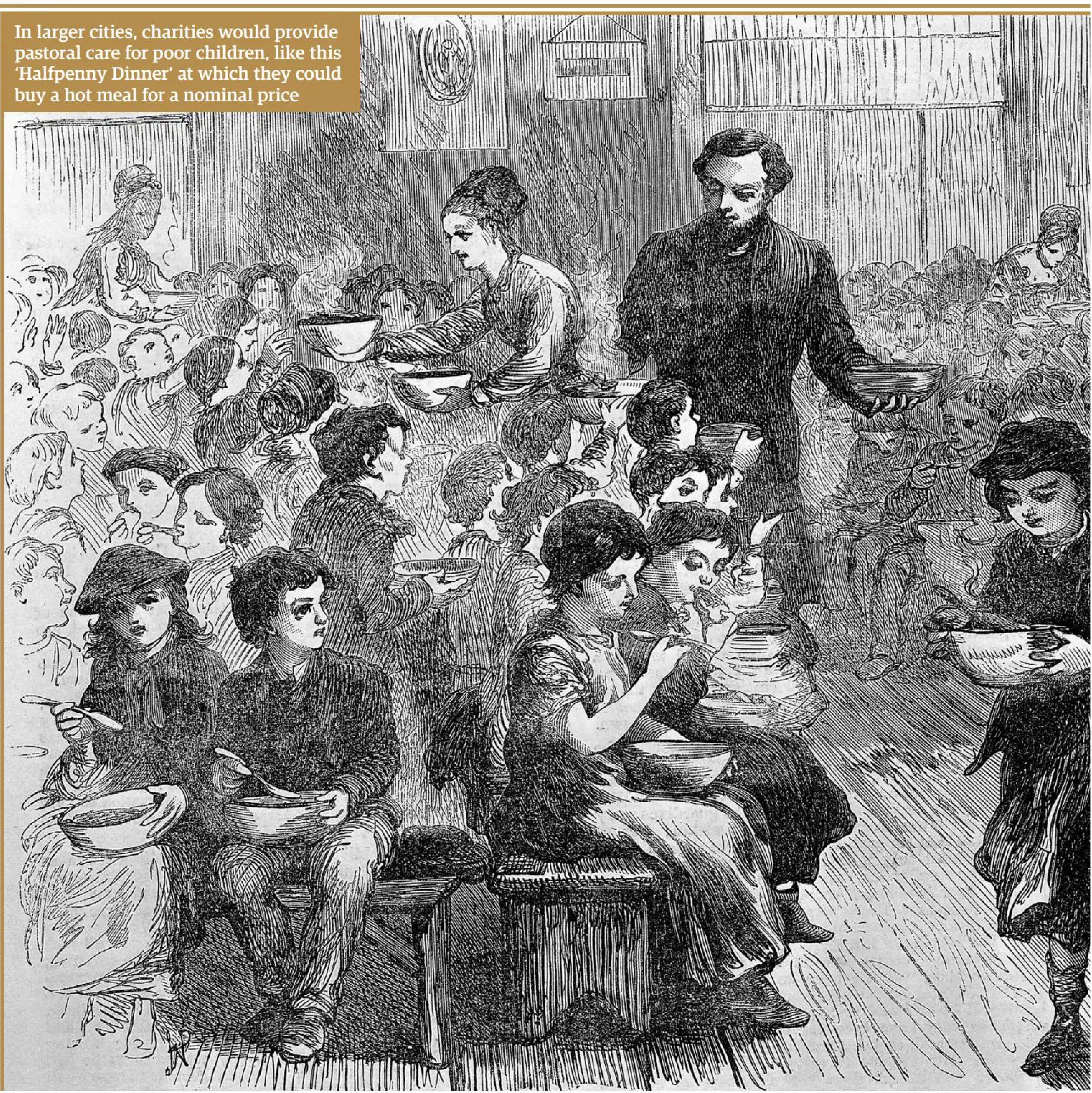
Urchins and orphans

What was life like for the poorest Victorian children?

The poorest Victorian children led a life of extreme poverty, deprivation and crime on the streets of cities and larger towns. They were nicknamed street urchins, after the hedgehogs (urchins) that Victorians used to keep in their basement kitchens to prey on insect pests. Street urchins were also little predators, often employed by adult criminals as lookouts, distraction-thieves and pickpockets. Guttersnipes scratched a pitiful living sifting through the foul contents of street gutters for anything of value. Street urchins may have lived with their equally poor parents, or in a dormitory or flophouse run by the criminal gangs that employed them.

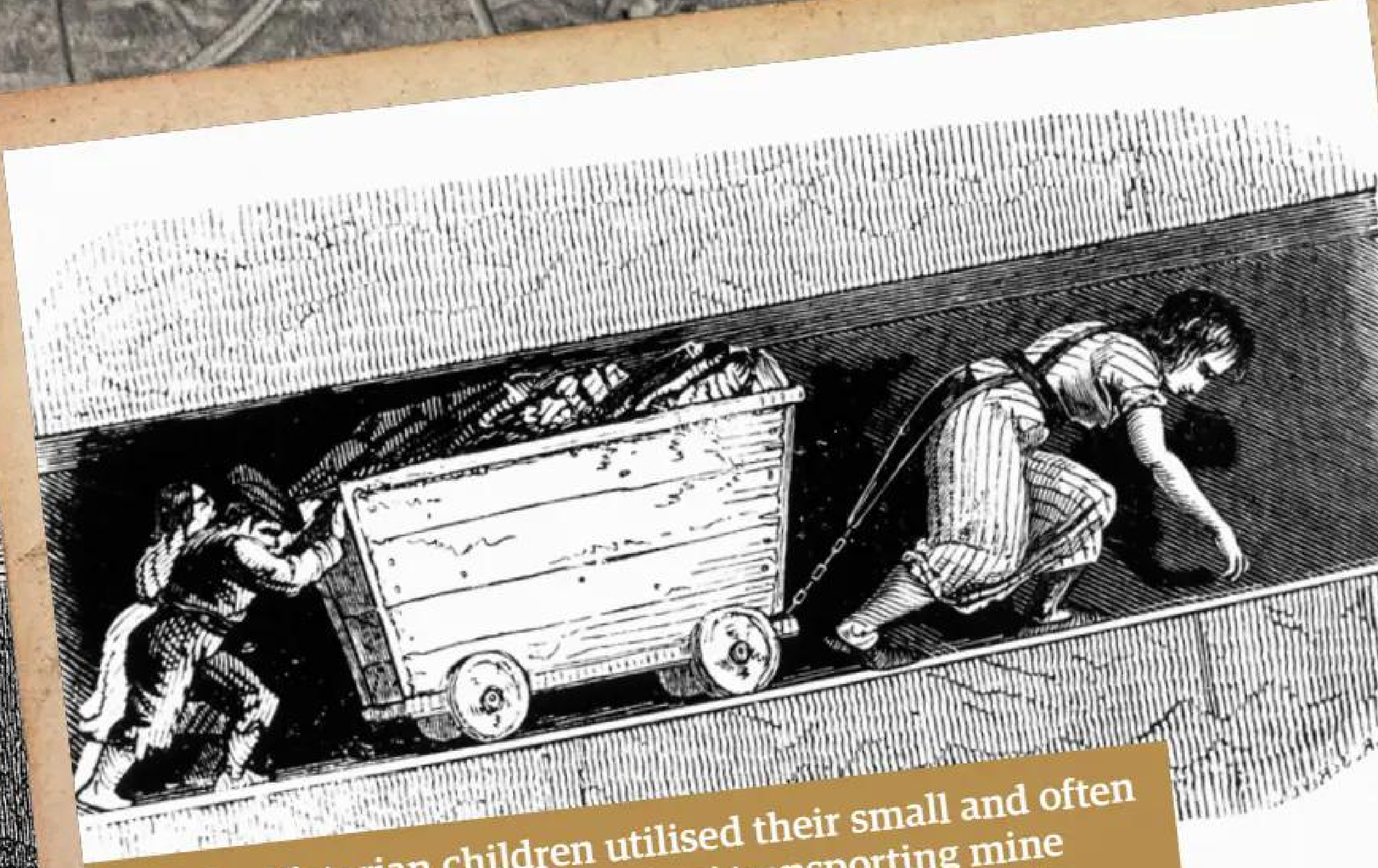
This life of crime was preferable to the orphanage or workhouse, however. Here children were expected to work for their keep, often fed on a cheap diet consisting mainly of bread or gruel (a type of thin porridge), and put to work doing laundry or picking oakum – pulling reusable fibres out of old rope. They would go on to heavier tasks as they got older. Smaller children had three hours of school a day, which consisted of basic reading and writing and repetitive rote learning (reciting facts and times tables). Girls were also taught sewing. Children in workhouses were separated from their siblings and, if they weren't already orphaned, their parents too. Many never saw their families again.

The poorest children had a choice between a life of crime on the streets or the punitive strictures of the dreaded workhouse


In larger cities, charities would provide pastoral care for poor children, like this 'Halfpenny Dinner' at which they could buy a hot meal for a nominal price

© Getty; Alamy

Wealthier children had more time to play and access to better toys, but were still subject to strict rules and punishments



Jobs for Victorian children utilised their small and often underfed size, like these 'putters' transporting mine carts full of ore through small underground tunnels

between so-called Oppidans – boys who lived in boarding houses off-campus, and who often had a better standard of living thanks to their elderly landladies – and Collegers, who lived at the school itself and were subject to a brutal culture that included institutionalised bullying from teachers and other boys alike, and even sexual assault. They were better off than many of the boys at lesser schools however – examples of letters home smuggled out on the mandatory Sunday church visits (the older, well-endowed schools had their own chapels on site) paint a picture of hunger, neglect, cold, disease, and abuse, none of which could be mentioned in the rigorously monitored and censored school mail for fear of further punishment. Boys at these schools were often the sons of yeoman farmers, factory owners and well-to-do tradesmen; nouveau riche middle classes who thought that by sending their sons to a boarding school, they were buying the social finesse and cachet that would enable their boys to ascend into the respectable careers in politics, the army and the church that were enjoyed by those who went to the greater schools – that is, the ones that wouldn't inherit vast wealth, tranches of land, a title and a seat in the House of Lords. How wrong they were. The aspiring classes would have been better served to send their sons into the Navy at the age of 12, where they could become 'young gentlemen' by demonstrating the skills and drive needed to become a commissioned officer. It was an established social ascent route: Admiral Horatio Nelson, a vicar's son, began his naval career as an able seaman and ended it as a flag officer and a viscount.

For a well-behaved Victorian girl from a reasonably wealthy family, childhood could be a long and idyllic era. Unless the family was particularly intellectual, few genteel Victorian girls were expected to be educated beyond the more rarefied end of the domestic sphere: the grunt work of the household was done by servants, leaving teenage girls free to become 'accomplished' in drawing room entertainments like music or arts and crafts – enticing attributes on the Victorian marriage market – and engage in 'good works' like organising or crafting decorative items to sell at charity bazaars. Even learning the arts of housekeeping consisted mainly of the soft skills necessary to effectively manage the domestic staff.

Servants were much more common in even lower middle-class families, and while only wealthier homes might have a butler, housekeeper and an array of maids, many had at least one: the tweeny. She was so-called because she was a maid-of-all-work who moved between Upstairs (the realm of the family, where she would lay and light fires, clean and tidy, and wait on her employers) and Downstairs (the realm of the servants, where she washed everything from laundry to kitchenware, emptied chamber pots, and a million other tasks that were far too foul for her gently bred employers to see). Today, a tween is a child between the ages of ten and 13; a tweeny maid could be much the same age. She was likely in her younger teens, and in exchange for room and board and a pitiful wage – at least some of which she was expected to send home to her impoverished family – she would work an average of a 16-hour day, six and a half days a week, with a yearly holiday on Mothering Sunday. If she was smart and lucky, and the family she worked for were well-connected, with hard work she might over the years manage to parlay her exhausting job into the better-paid and more respectable role of ladies' maid or housekeeper. It was backbreaking work, but preferable to going into the factories or onto the streets to make or sell matches, jobs that resulted in their young and predominantly female workforce developing a necrotising bone cancer nicknamed 'phossy jaw', caused by the constant exposure to flammable phosphorus.

Wealthy Victorian children were often raised by a nursemaid or nanny and spent only limited time with their parents as infants

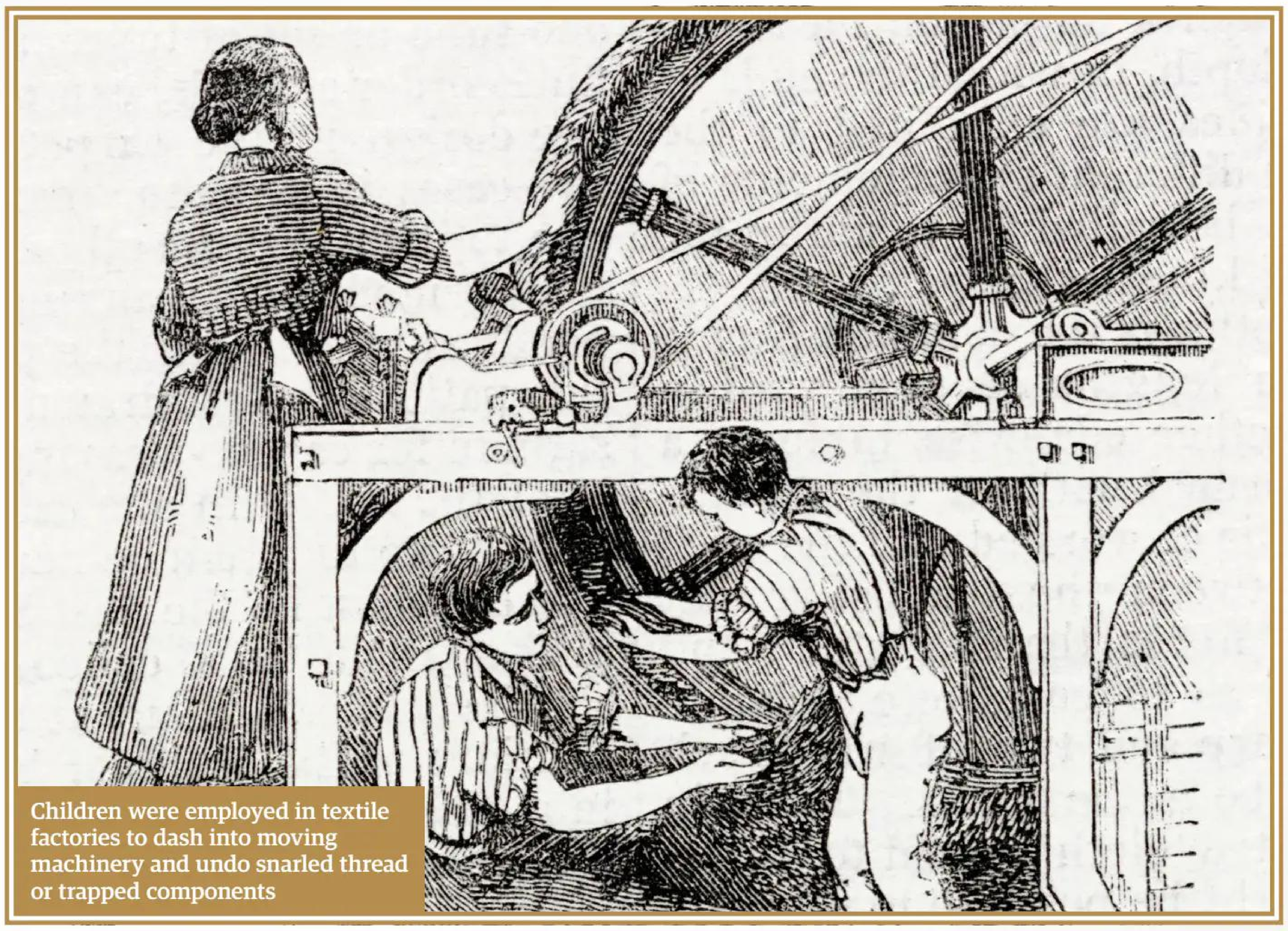
School days

Education for all children began with the Victorians

In 1880, a law was passed in Britain making it compulsory for all children aged between five and ten to go to school from Monday to Friday. Social reformers hoped that this would keep poor children off the streets and out of the often dangerous jobs that had employed them, as well as help to break the cycle of multigenerational poverty. So-called 'ragged schools' had existed before this, designed for children too scruffy and rowdy to attend church Sunday school and set up by charitable benefactors.

The new compulsory schools were considerably less appealing than their pastorally minded predecessors. Boys and girls were usually kept separated outside of the classroom, a tall, chilly space with windows placed deliberately high so they couldn't look out of them. Teachers – mainly older, unmarried women – didn't have to pass any qualifications themselves and taught only the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic, mainly through repetitive exercises like chanting or copying down sums, words and phrases. Discipline was harsh, using corporal punishment, and children who struggled with their work were publicly humiliated by being sent to a corner of the classroom and made to wear a dunce's hat – a tall pointed cone with the letter D on it.

Schools for poor and ordinary children were rigid, strict environments where learning was repetitive and discipline was harsh



Children were employed in textile factories to dash into moving machinery and undo snarled thread or trapped components

The poor tweeny had to deal with cleaning the vast hearths of her employers' fireplaces, but her unfortunate younger brother might have a worse task ahead. His parents may have apprenticed him to a chimney sweep, or he could have been adopted from an orphanage or workhouse by the sweep himself, but the outcome was the same. Hopeful parents or inattentive benefactors might think the boy was learning a trade; the reality was that his small malnourished frame made him perfect for worming his way up into the multistorey chimneys of large homes and civic buildings to clean them more effectively. If he didn't damage his legs, spine, eyes or lungs in the early part of his career (boys could start as young as four), or become trapped and suffocate or burn in a narrow chimney, then in adolescence, he was likely to fall prey to Chimney Sweep Cancer, a painful and often fatal disease of the genitals caused by the carcinogens he constantly came into contact with. Given only one day off a year, on May Day, these poor boys often lived in squalid conditions, suffered from chronic respiratory ailments, and were deliberately underfed in order to keep them slim enough to fit into narrow spaces. The last sweep's climbing boy to die of work-related injuries was 12-year-old George Brewster, who became trapped in a hospital chimney in February 1875. Later that year, a bill entered the UK Parliament that outlawed the use of children as chimney sweeps. Children who worked in other industries, like the textile factory 'scavengers' whose job was to run into working looms and untangle threads and shuttles, or those who toiled underground in Britain's mines, had to wait until 1933 before it was made illegal for children to work for an employer while they were under the age of 13 in anything other than a light role with limited hours. Those who worked on family farms, smallholdings, or in the few remaining cottage industries, however, were exempt from such laws – and it's an urban myth that Britain's school summer holidays are six weeks long so that Victorian farmers' children could help with the harvest. They actually have more to do with the Calendar of Saints and the Holy Days of Obligation of the medieval church, when working was forbidden, filtered through the idealised fascination that Victorian social reformers had with all things Middle Ages. Britain's school summer holidays fall in July and August, when a host of traditional saints' days and multi-day ecclesiastical feasts were once celebrated, while the country's main harvest season falls in September and October, when children are firmly back at school. The fact that they are there and not in one of the brutal jobs or institutions of the 1800s is something that today's children have the Victorians to thank for.

> "His small malnourished frame made him perfect for worming his way up into the multistorey chimneys"

© Getty, Alamy

FREAKY FA

LIFTING THE LID ON THE WEIRD AND WONDERFUL

SCINATIONS

Written by David J Williamson

WORLD THAT WAS THE VICTORIAN FREAK SHOW

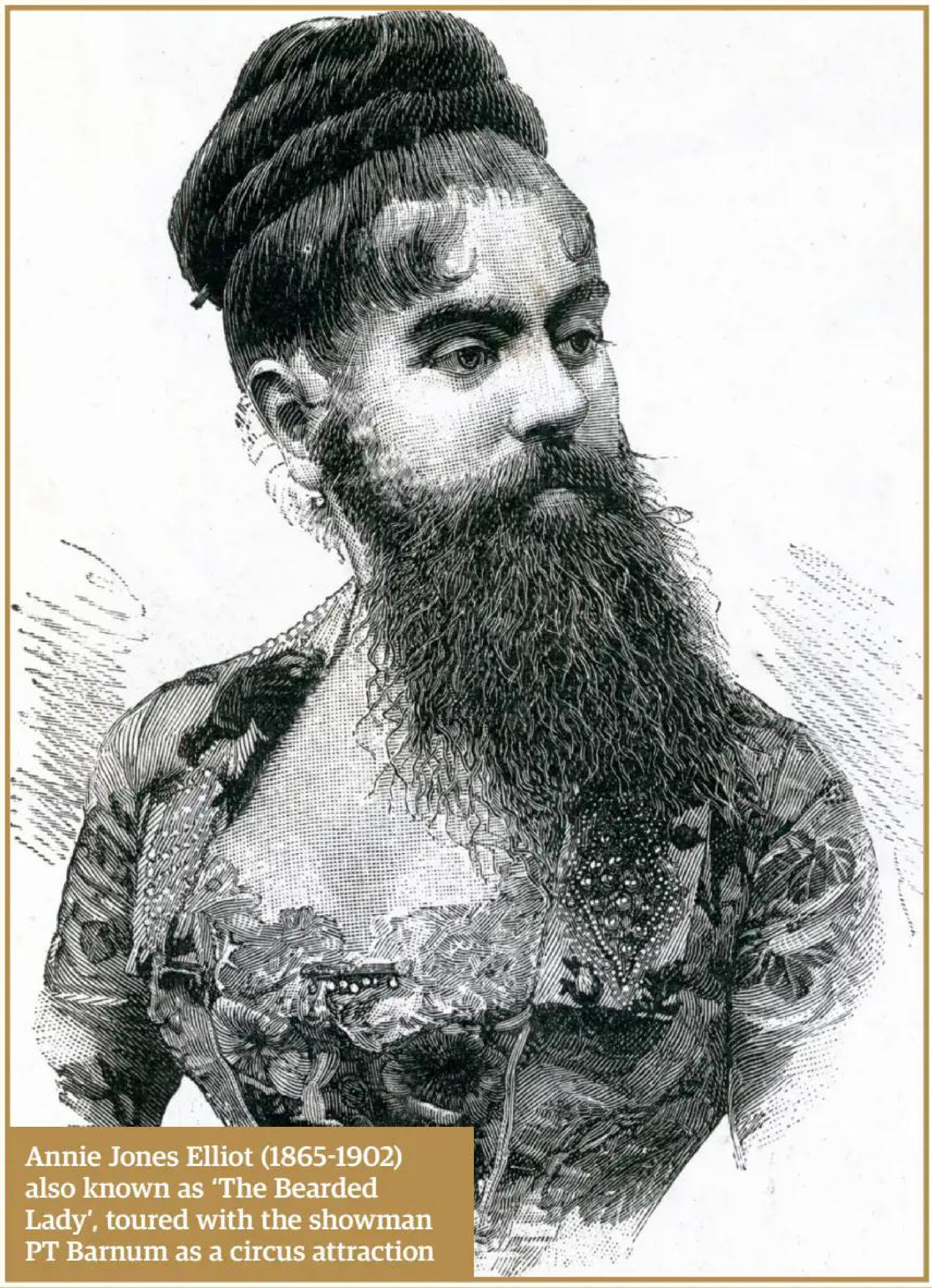
© Alamy, Getty Images

The very idea of a freak show may be completely alien to our modern way of thinking, but the origins of this love affair with the unusual side of nature goes back hundreds, if not thousands of years. It ranges from Goliath in the *Old Testament* to the depictions of impish dwarfs that adorned the pottery and stonework of ancient Greece and Rome, and on to the underground dwellers of Norse and Germanic mythology who would both trick and curse unsuspecting humans for pleasure or revenge. Indeed, the original meaning of the word 'freak' is that of a sudden change, a trick or a prank, and as we shall see there is more than a little truth in this.

For dwarfs in particular it was to be the royal houses of Europe that were to set the tone for how they and other people of natural difference were to be viewed. Kings and queens – from Spain to Poland to England – counted among their households at least one dwarf. It was thought that their bodies made them almost mythical creatures, born out of the supernatural, that would bring good fortune.

Most notable in England was Jeffrey Hudson, court dwarf to Henrietta Maria, queen of the doomed Charles I. Pampered and protected by the queen, he rose from a poor background to be an entertaining addition to the Stuart court. But with this charmed lifestyle came a price, and many questions. Was it just good fortune that made his diminutive size so appealing to the queen and her court? Was his entertaining and witty character much larger than his physical presence? Or did his size make him nothing more than an amusing pet just like the other exotic animals with which Maria adorned her apartments?

The fascination with physical difference wasn't just a privileged entertainment. Between the 16th and 18th centuries travelling displays of human 'monstrosities' zig-zagged across Europe to entertain and amaze. Although saved from this existence, Jeffrey Hudson was in many ways just as much on display.


Annie Jones Elliot (1865-1902) also known as 'The Bearded Lady', toured with the showman PT Barnum as a circus attraction

By the early years of the 19th century individuals such as the dwarfish Józef Boruwłaski were thrilling the aristocratic courts of Europe. Literally at the other end of the scale, the Englishman Daniel Lambert – weighing in at over 52 stones – found his way into a nation's hearts through pamphlets and promotion to symbolise the very essence and physical power of the blossoming British Empire. This was a new kind of self-preservation and self-promotion; the freaks of nature taking control of their own exhibition. Not for them the lowliness of the travelling show. They were to 'receive' visitors in expensive and comfortable rooms, their 'appearances' more a private meeting, using the morbid interest in their unusual physiques to their own advantage both financially and for controlling how they wished to be seen by the world.

As the 19th century dawned, for the freak shows the questioning minds of the medical and scientific communities were, not surprisingly, never far away. The word 'scientist' had not yet been used, nor for that matter had 'disability', but for many of the promoters of exhibitions of freaks in the early Victorian era, medical and scientific interest in their performers was a sure-fire way of grabbing the attention of the press and the public at large.

In 1829 the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly, London, hosted a remarkable event. Having exhibited in a number of towns and cities in the USA, conjoined twins Chang and Eng astonished, delighted and intrigued their audiences in a masterful display of skill and spectacle. Even though joined at their upper body they were still able to perform somersaults and other acrobatics, as well as batting a shuttlecock between them at lightning speed.

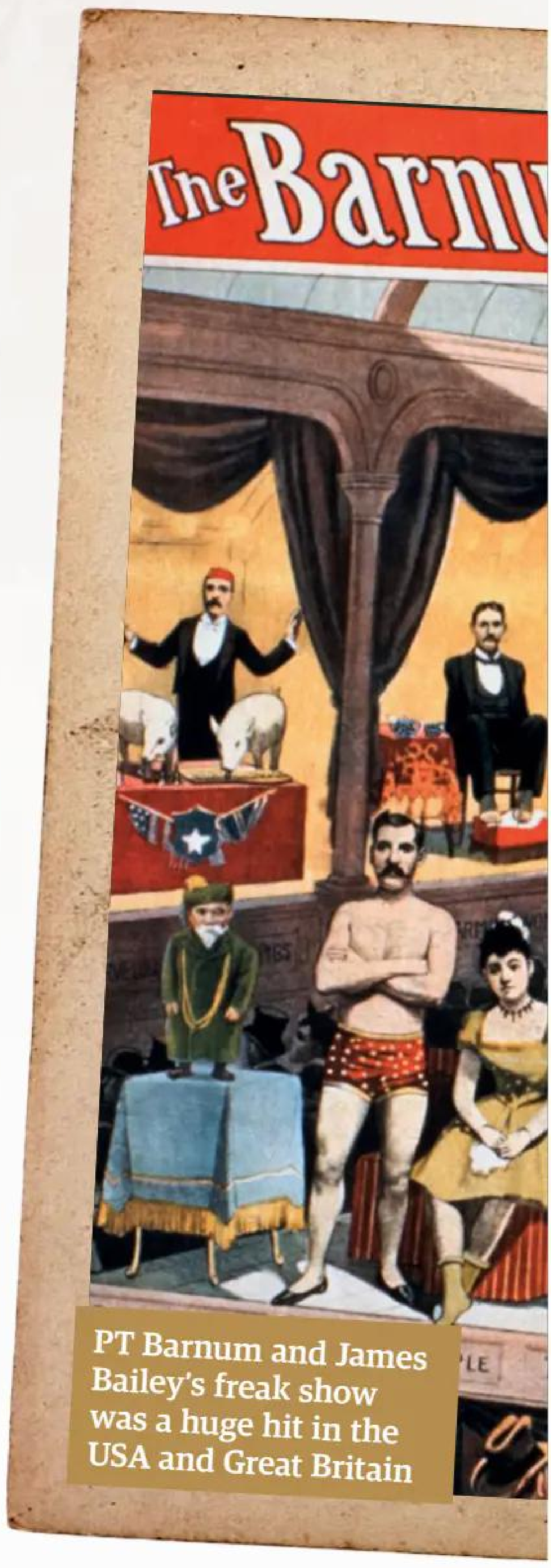
> "It is a way of making a living, and we are very grateful"

They were billed as the Siamese Twins (after their birthplace of Siam, or modern Thailand) – an expression that soon found its way into general usage to describe conjoined twins right up to the present day.

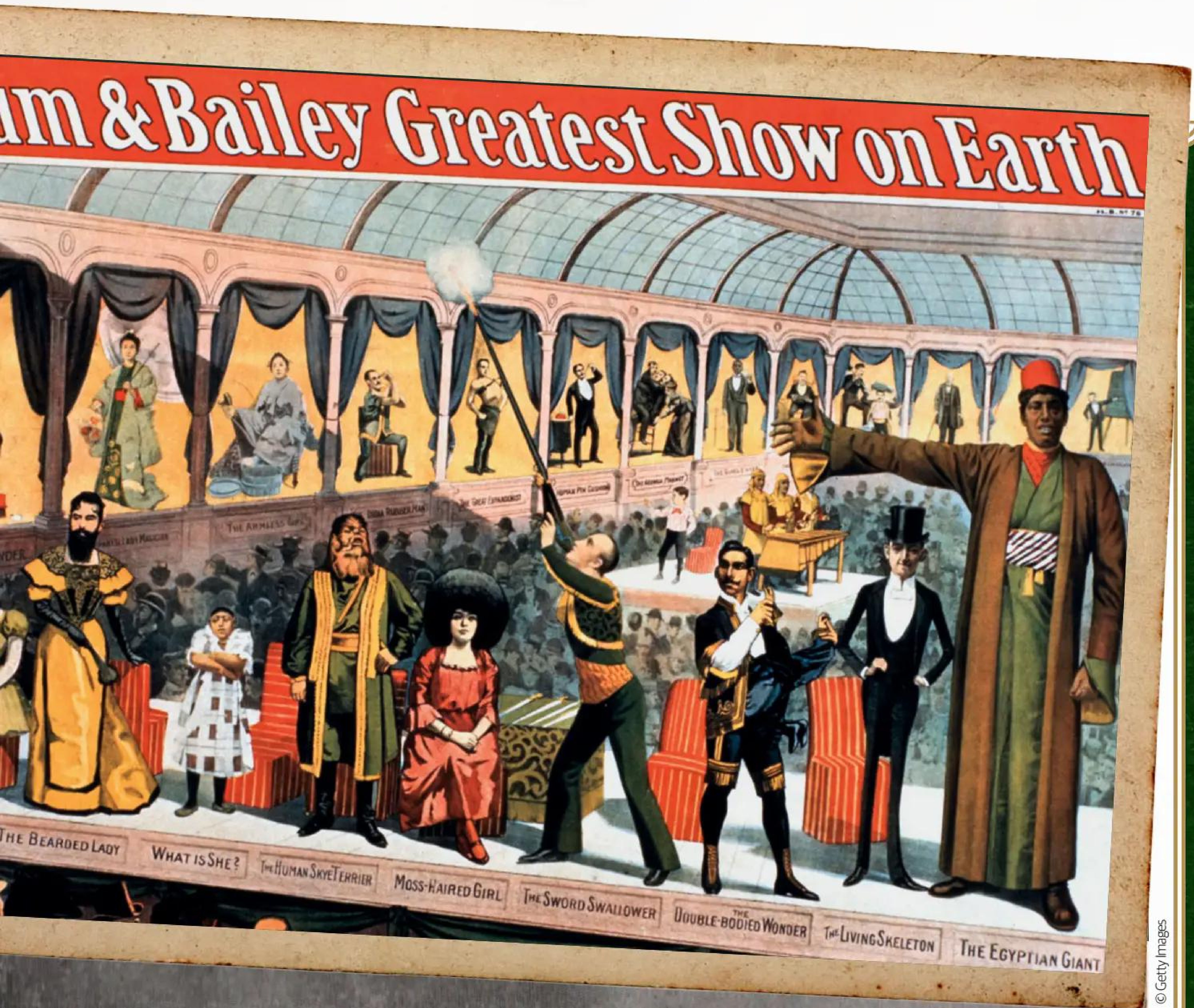
"It's a way of making a living, and we are very grateful," they would tell the onlookers. But perhaps more disturbing was the invitation to the public to prod and touch them, especially on the uncovered area of flesh that bound the two brothers together.

This was not unusual in freak shows, and it would seem the closeness of the 'audience participation' in being able to explore the exhibits with their hands as well as their eyes added to the attraction. It raises questions, however, as to exactly how freaks were viewed by the public. And perhaps just as importantly, how they were viewed by the people putting them on display. But the event at the Egyptian Hall also saw a major turning point in the development of the freak exhibition. Far from being a ramshackle travelling show it was a reputable, even scientifically educational, event in a prestigious location. With that came a level of respectability and acceptance that was to set the tone for the future.

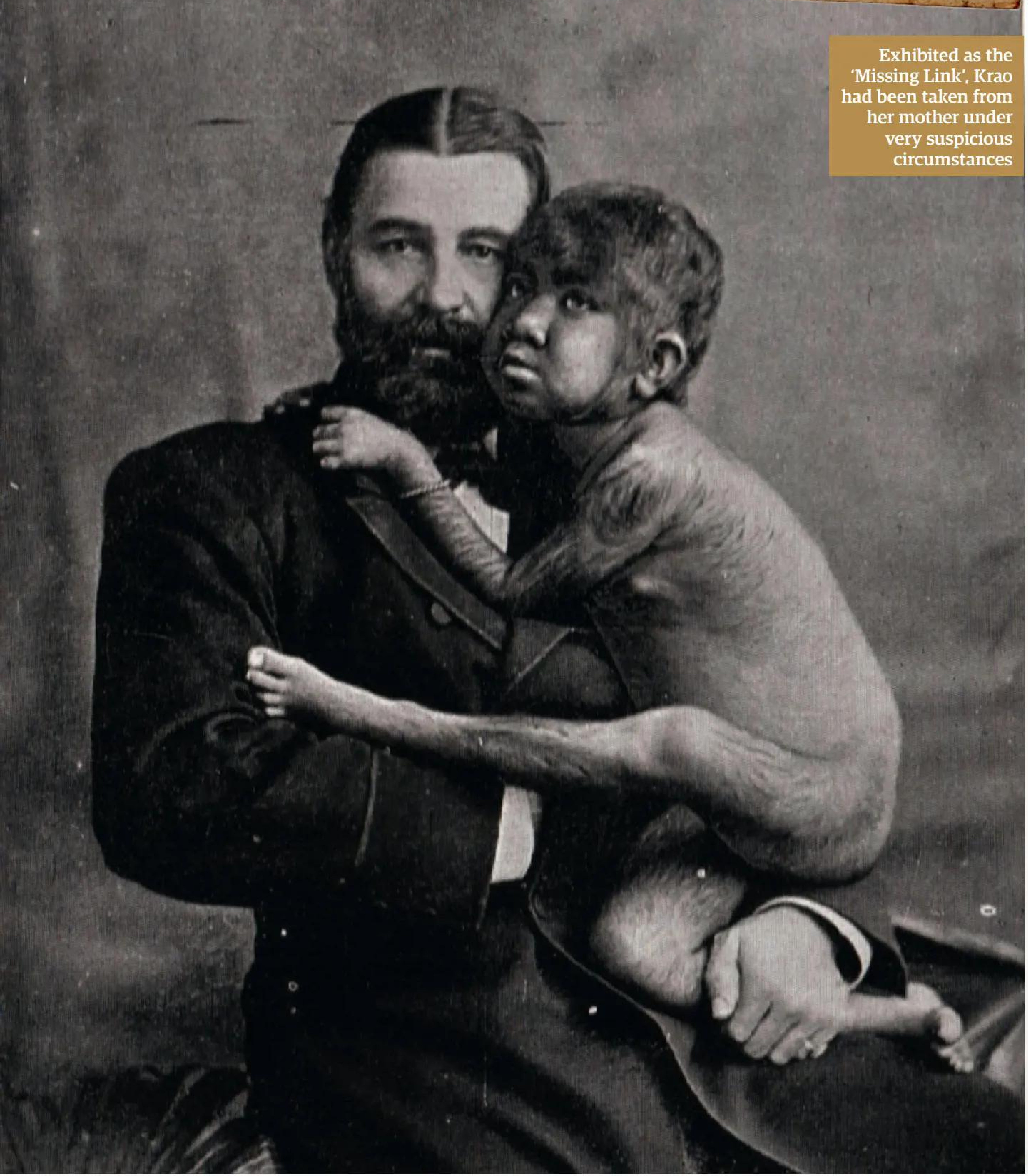
Across the Atlantic in the USA, however, there was a rising star whose impact on the world of the freak show is arguably beyond comparison. PT Barnum was a man with huge energy and a sharp business mind. He was a firm believer in giving people what they wanted even if he had to bend the rules, and the truth, to do it. His was a world of artistic licence and, like the early pioneers of moving images that were to emerge after him, the suspension



PT Barnum and James Bailey's freak show was a huge hit in the USA and Great Britain


um & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth
The Bearded Lady
What is She?
The Human Skye Terrier
Moss-Haired Girl
The Sword Swallower
The Double-Bodied Wonder
The Living Skeleton
The Egyptian Giant

© Getty Images



Exhibited as the 'Missing Link', Krao had been taken from her mother under very suspicious circumstances

MY PERSONAL FASCINATION

An Interview with Dr John Woolf

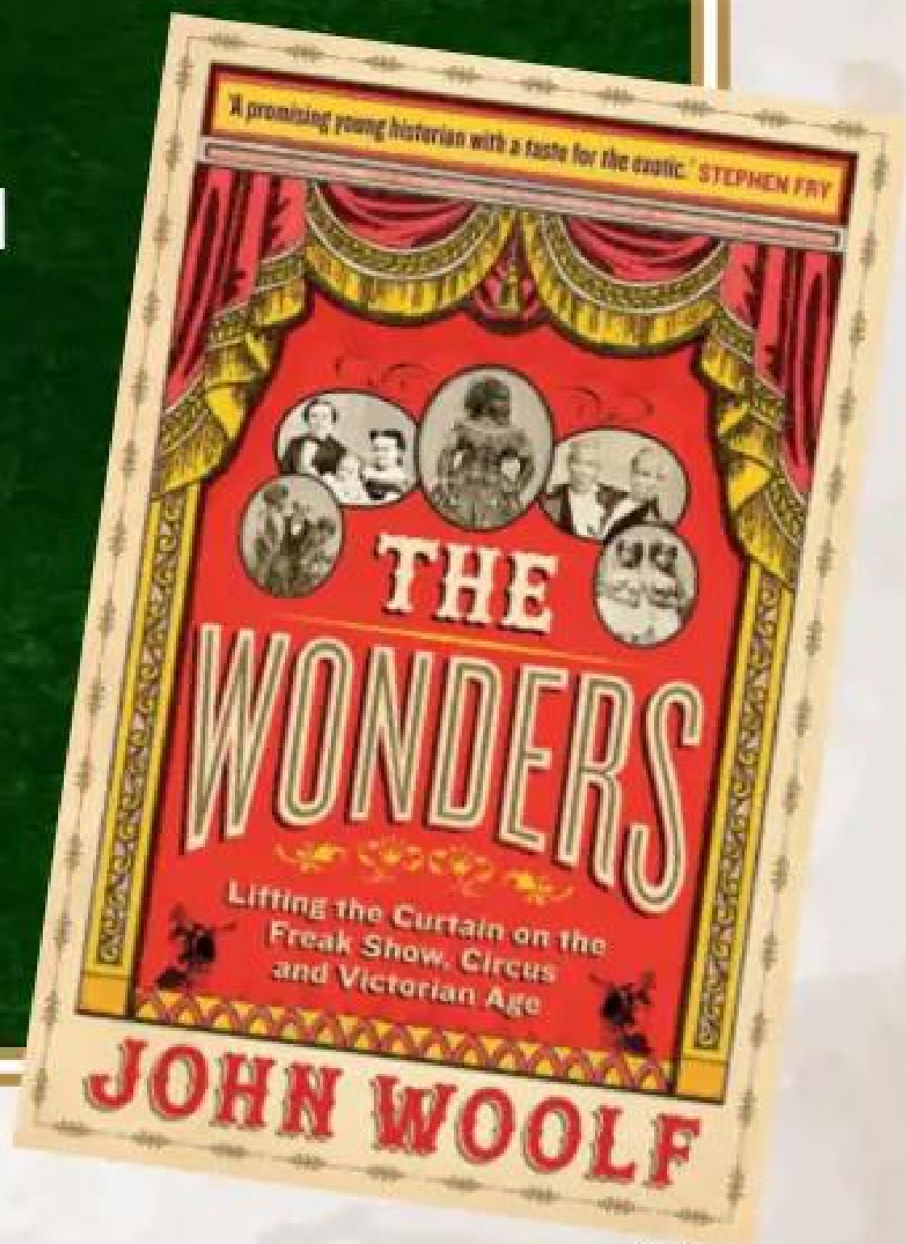
What was it that inspired your interest in freak shows?
When I was around nine I watched David Lynch's film *The Elephant Man*. I was scared at the sight of the Elephant Man but felt compassion for the person behind the deformities, Joseph Merrick. That film sparked a 20-year obsession, which culminated in my book.

What was the most difficult part of your research into freak shows?
The structure! How to select and arrange the stories and the analysis in an accessible way that tells a broader history of the freak show. That was my challenge – I'll let you judge if I was successful!

In approaching the subject, what did you personally have to come to terms with?
Regrettably, due to the nature of the sources, there's a lot we don't know about freak performers, so imbuing them with agency and subjectivity was an almost impossible task. Plus, finding the right language to discuss the individuals and the subject was something I had to consider at length.

Which individual story and experience stands out for you?
Julia Pastrana, the 'Baboon Lady' who was reportedly kind and compassionate, married her showman, gave birth to a baby boy and was embalmed by her showman-cum-husband after she died. Her story brings together love, tragedy and exploitation.

What differences do you hope your work has made in the understanding of freak shows and how do you think a modern world should remember them?
I hope that people will have a clearer sense of the humanity behind the freakery: an awareness of the talented performers who transformed popular culture. I also hope people will learn that the freak show was never a marginal affair but a central part of 19th century culture, and that it's legacy still reverberates today in everything from 'fake news' to social media to our TV screens and gossip magazines.

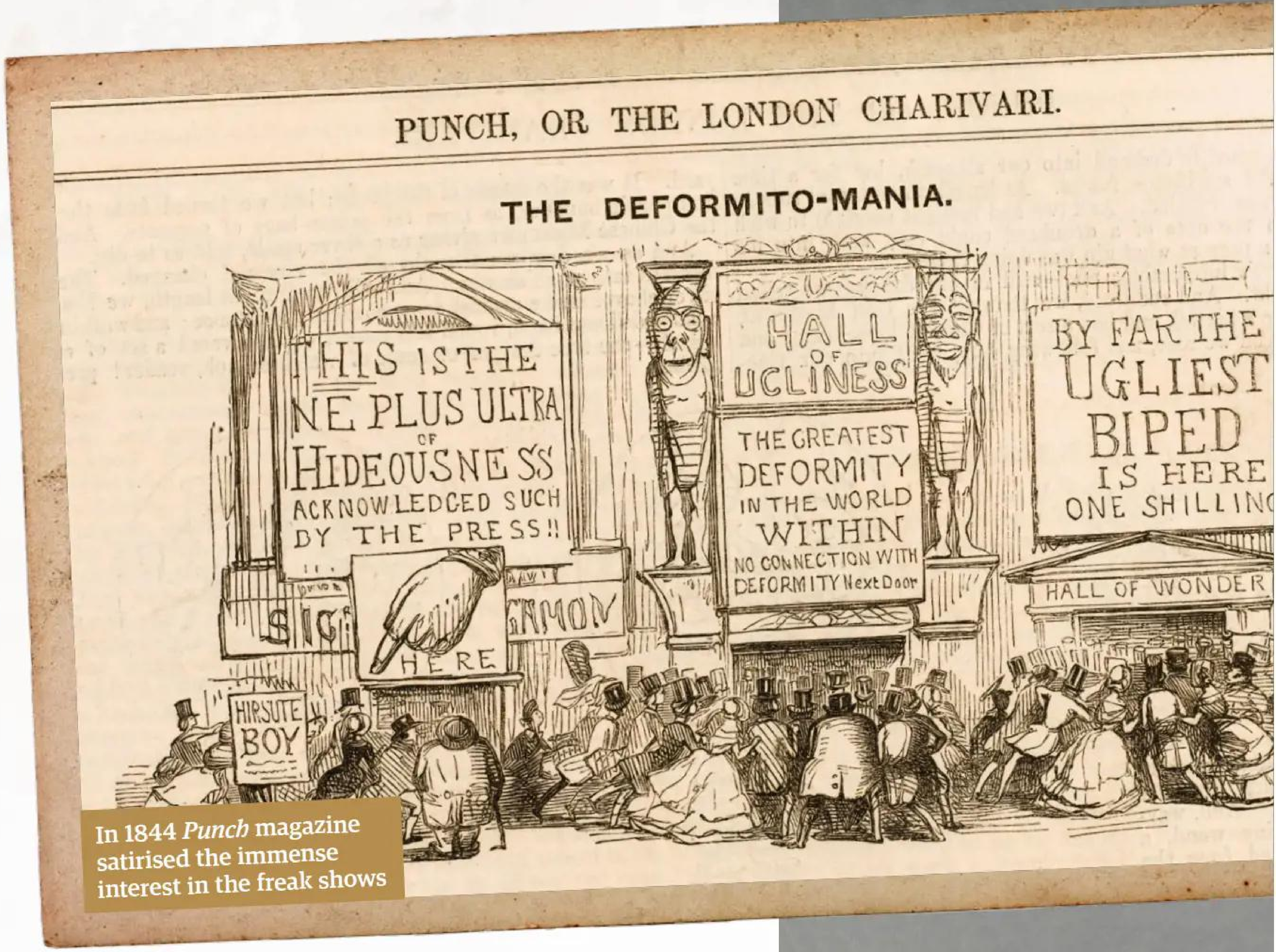

'A promising young historian with a taste for the exotic' STEPHEN FRY
THE WONDERS
Lifting the Curtain on the Freak Show, Circus and Victorian Age
JOHN WOOLF

Dr John Woolf is a writer, historian and the author of *The Wonders: Lifting The Curtain On The Freak Show, Circus And Victorian Age*

of disbelief. His enthusiastic early years in the world of the freak show were a mixture of success and disappointment, with two very public exposés of fakes in the form of the Feejee Mermaid and the supposed 161-year-old nurse of George Washington, Joice Heth, threatening to ruin his reputation.

But ever confident in his abilities to persuade and dazzle the public, Barnum was not to be deterred. As an early master of publicity and the power of advertising he forged on relentlessly to greater things. Having bought the American Museum on New York's Broadway – one of many 'Dime Museums' at the time – he set about turning it into a centre of entertainment like no other, and affordable to all. Within its walls visitors could marvel at a huge collection of wild animals and, of course, gape and wonder at the many freak performers that Barnum had begun to employ. The museum was a huge success and the showman went from strength to strength. But it was to be his discovery of a tiny boy of just four years old and a mere 25 inches high that was to propel him to international acclaim. Because of his height, Charles Stratton was already a curiosity worthy of any freak show. But as his stage persona General Tom Thumb he was to become arguably the very first international celebrity the world had ever seen.

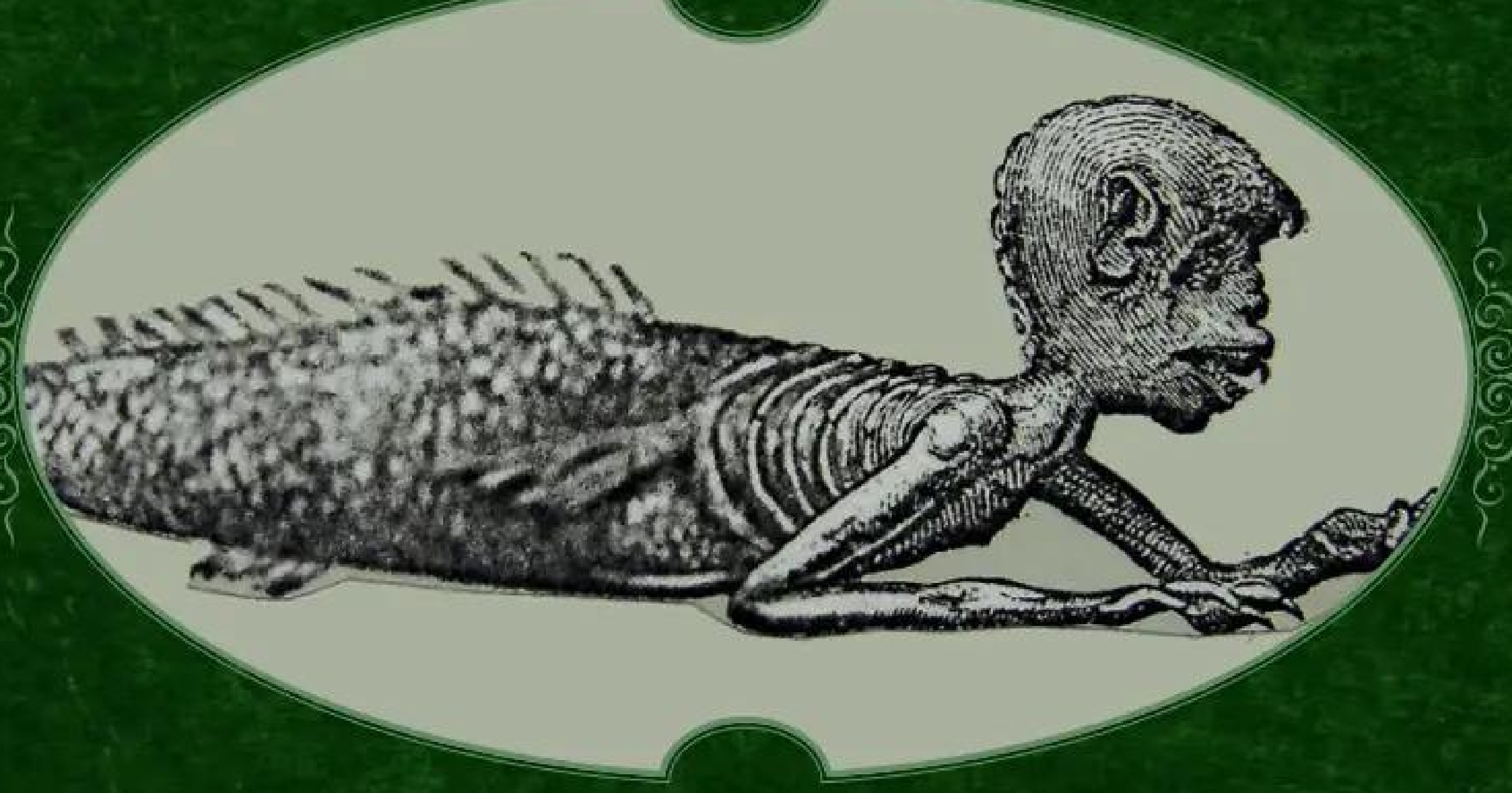
He was an instant success, and even in a world that traded in difference he was unique. Despite his height he was not like other dwarfs, being a normally proportioned human despite


PUNCH, OR THE LONDON CHARIVARI.
THE DEFORMITO-MANIA.
HIS IS THE NE PLUS ULTRA OF HIDEOUSNESS ACKNOWLEDGED SUCH BY THE PRESS!!
HALL OF UGLINESS
THE GREATEST DEFORMITY IN THE WORLD WITHIN
NO CONNECTION WITH DEFORMITY Next Door
BY FAR THE UGLIEST BIPED IS HERE ONE SHILLING
HALL OF WONDER
HERE
HIRSUTE BOY

In 1844 *Punch* magazine satirised the immense interest in the freak shows

FREAKY FAKES

What you see is not always what you get



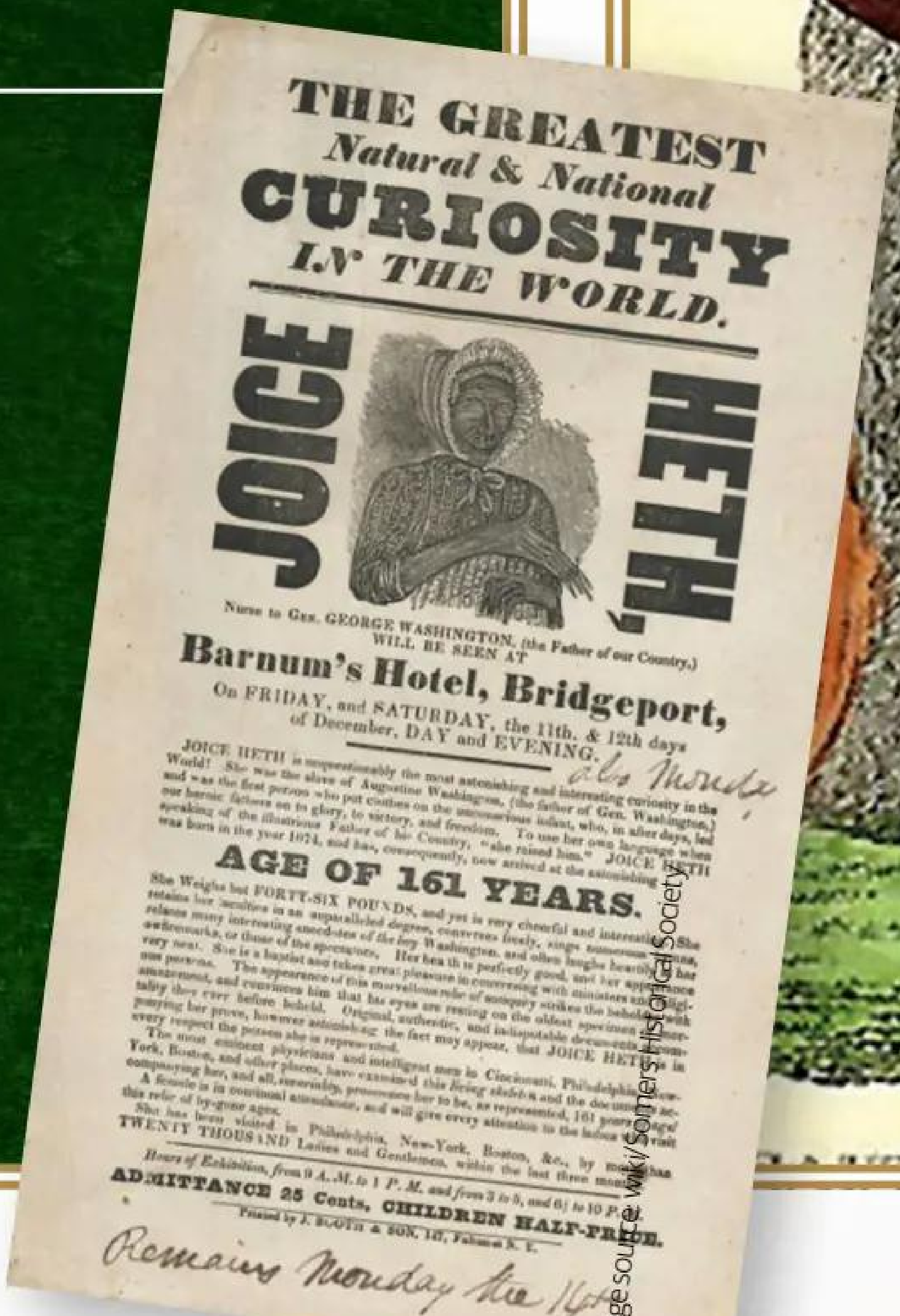
© Alamy

The Feejee Mermaid

PT Barnum and other showmen obviously believed that telling the story was better than telling the truth. His Feejee Mermaid attraction was nothing more than a monkey's mummified body sewn onto a large fish tail. Some may have felt cheated, but most loved the story and were excited and curious to view it anyway!

Joice Heth

Another of Barnum's tricks was to exhibit an infirm African American slave woman called Joice Heth. It was claimed she was 161 and had been the nursemaid of George Washington. Despite the fact that Heth could hardly move except lift her arm to smoke a pipe, and hardly spoke, crowds flocked to see her. When she died it was discovered she was no more than 80 and a fake. But even then Barnum made a show of it and charged people 50 cents to view the post mortem!



THE GREATEST
Natural & National
CURIOSITY
IN THE WORLD.

JOICE HETH,

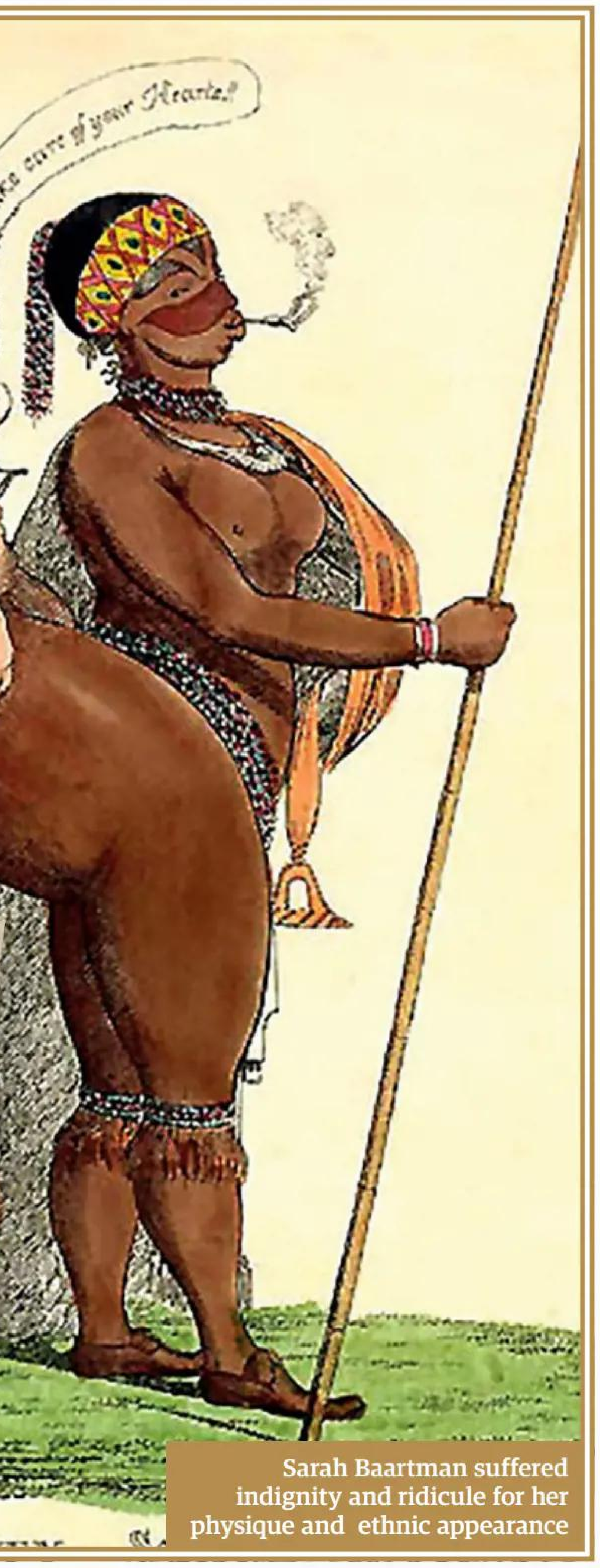
Nurse to Gen. GEORGE WASHINGTON, (the Father of our Country,)
WILL BE SEEN AT
Barnum's Hotel, Bridgeport,
On FRIDAY, and SATURDAY, the 11th, & 12th days
of December, DAY and EVENING.
also Monday

AGE OF 161 YEARS.

ADMITTANCE 25 Cents, CHILDREN HALF-PRICE.

Remains Monday the 14th

Image source: wiki/Somers Historical Society


Take care of your Hearts!

Sarah Baartman suffered indignity and ridicule for her physique and ethnic appearance

Image source: wiki/westminster.gov.uk

Barnum and Charles Stratton (General Tom Thumb) created the first global celebrity

© Alamy

© Alamy

his diminutive stature. And nor was he a curiosity to be merely stared at and prodded by a curious public. Here was a performer: a singer, dancer and storyteller. His audience in 1844 with Queen Victoria was a huge success. Both she and Albert were great fans of the freak show and were happy to give their support to such an entertaining and fascinating performer, sparking what *Punch* magazine called 'Deformito-Mania'. There could be no greater level of acceptance and respectability for the public at large to follow than royal approval. His tours in Britain and Europe brought him, and Barnum, fame and fortune.

But he was not alone in giving added value to the world of the freak show. The Siamese Twins had brought a physical dynamic to their performances of tumbles and acrobatics. However, middle class audiences in slightly more up-market venues with money to burn were becoming far more discerning and demanding in the sophistication of their entertainments, even from freak performers.

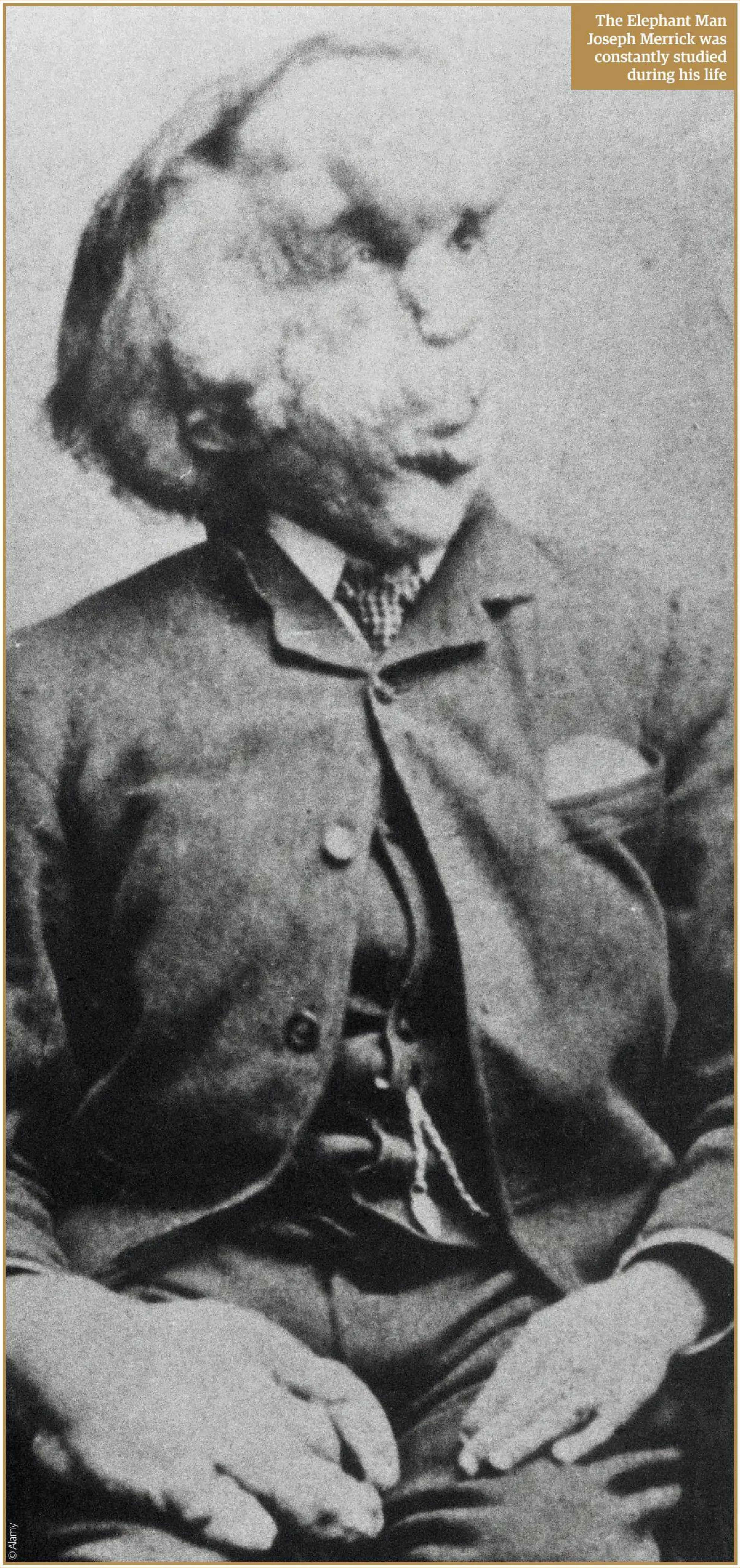
On first impression Julia Pastrana was the archetypal freak show exhibit. Her body and face were covered in coarse hair, her jaw protruding forwards and her lips so thick as to give the impression she had a second set of teeth. Billed as the 'Bear Woman' and sometimes 'Baboon Lady' or the 'Non-Descript', her appearance completely contradicted her personality even in a world full of contradictions. She was an accomplished dancer, musician and singer, with what those who met her called a ready wit and charm and the ability to speak a number of languages. In short, like Tom Thumb, Julia was a performer, not just a static curiosity. She toured and exhibited with great success throughout Europe and, despite her manager husband being an unscrupulous crook, made a very good living.

> "She was an exhibit; an exotic oddity from a distant mysterious land to be studied and examined, and certainly not 'one of us'"

Unlike Tom Thumb, however, the curiosity surrounding Julia had a more sinister side, one of many which cast an indelible black shadow over freak shows as an industry. Sarah Baartman – The Hottentot Venus – was a South African native woman exhibited in the early years of the 19th century. Dressed in a skin-tight costume, it was the large size of her buttocks that were central to the interest of those paying to see her and she was the focus of both curiosity and ridicule. In the eyes of the audience she was an exhibit; an exotic oddity from a distant mysterious land to be studied and examined, and certainly not 'one of us'.

As European powers sailed the globe to secure territory and wealth, their exploration brought discovery of new lands and new peoples, bringing them back to fire the imaginations of a nation. It is of wonder that Victoria, as queen of the largest empire on Earth, had such an interest in what, in the freak shows industry, was known as the exotic.

There were many fairs and shows that exhibited 'exotic peoples' – from Native Americans to Inuit, Fijian and Oriental. In the same way as the 'born freaks' of conjoined twins, dwarfs, giants and limbless performers gave onlookers a growing understanding and confidence in their own physical normality, the exotic freaks



The Elephant Man Joseph Merrick was constantly studied during his life

© Alamy

were a means by which to judge how civilised and superior white Western culture was compared to such 'savages'. In the age of Darwin and the heated debate around the ancestry of mankind this played straight into the hands of the freak show owners. Julia was billed as the offspring of a union between animal and human. The young child Krao, again unnaturally covered in hair, was displayed and exhibited as the 'Missing Link', living proof that at some distant point in the past man and apes were one and the same.

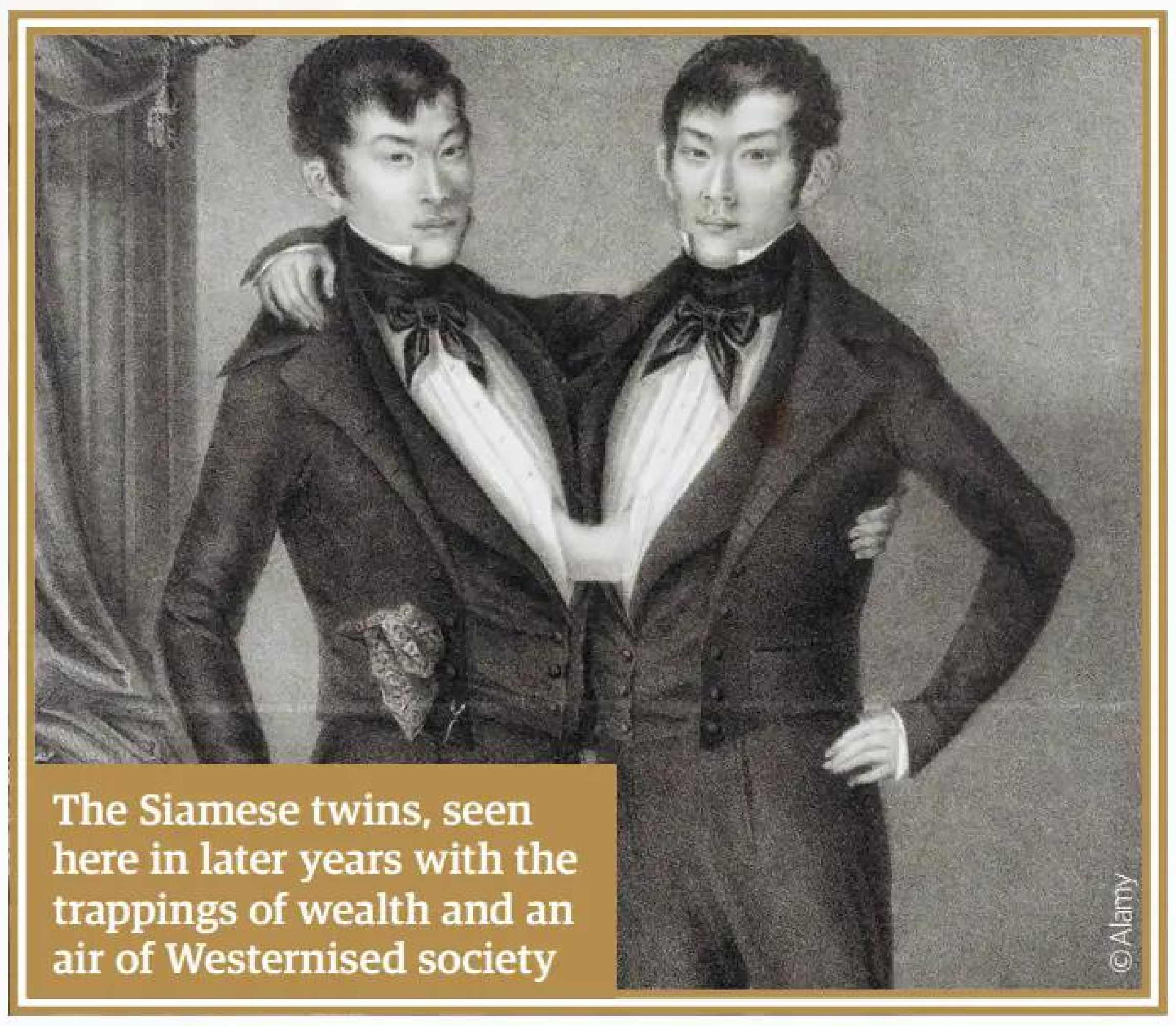
And so, in a world desperate for order and structure in the way of things, Pastrana never managed to get past the point of being a freak. Despite marriage and the birth of a child (which sadly only lived for a short time), she would forever be the Baboon Lady, an animal with no soul. Following her death she was embalmed along with her dead child, dressed in her performance gown, and exhibited in London in a glass case, stripped of her dignity, a timeless exhibit for an ever-curious world.

In obtaining and exhibiting freak performers, showmen had never had too many principles or scruples, ranging from criminal to outright immoral, and lies came easily. When exhibiting Tom Thumb, Barnum claimed he was 11 when in reality he was merely four. The performer's parents were involved, but it's debatable as to whether any payment was a contract or a purchase. The young Thai child Krao was literally plucked from her home, her mother paid in cash for the inconvenience. At such a young age any consent to be exhibited from the performer herself was non-existent. Millie and Christine, the conjoined twins known as the 'Two Headed Nightingale' were born into slavery, and stayed as such for many years even while performing their singing and dancing routine around the world, including for Queen Victoria. While their past was never actively hidden, for the freak industry to seemingly condone slavery demonstrates just how low the bar had been set in the pursuit of profit. In fact, the many showmen involved were guilty of regarding their performers as their property; objects to be displayed and traded.

> "Many showmen involved were guilty of regarding their performers as their property; objects to be displayed and traded"

For the performers themselves there was also a very human side to the story. In the freak shows they were not alone. A camaraderie grew as it does with any troupe of performers. Nor were they on the shadowy margins of society, but in the thick of it. Friendships and even relationships were not uncommon. At the wedding in London of the two giant performers Martin Bates and Anna Swan (each around eight feet) Millie and Christine were the bridesmaids. It was a widely reported and popular story, injecting a tiny bit of normality into the otherwise topsy-turvy world of the freak performers. And for those who reached the dizzy heights of national and international fame there were riches to be had, causing one freak performer to state, "If they think I'm being exploited they haven't seen my pay cheque!"

As the public appetite for entertainment grew, so did the shows. Not to be outdone, or literally miss the boat, the pioneering showmen Barnum and James Bailey created the Barnum and Bailey Circus; but with typical flair, an eye for publicity and


The Siamese twins, seen here in later years with the trappings of wealth and an air of Westernised society

© Alamy

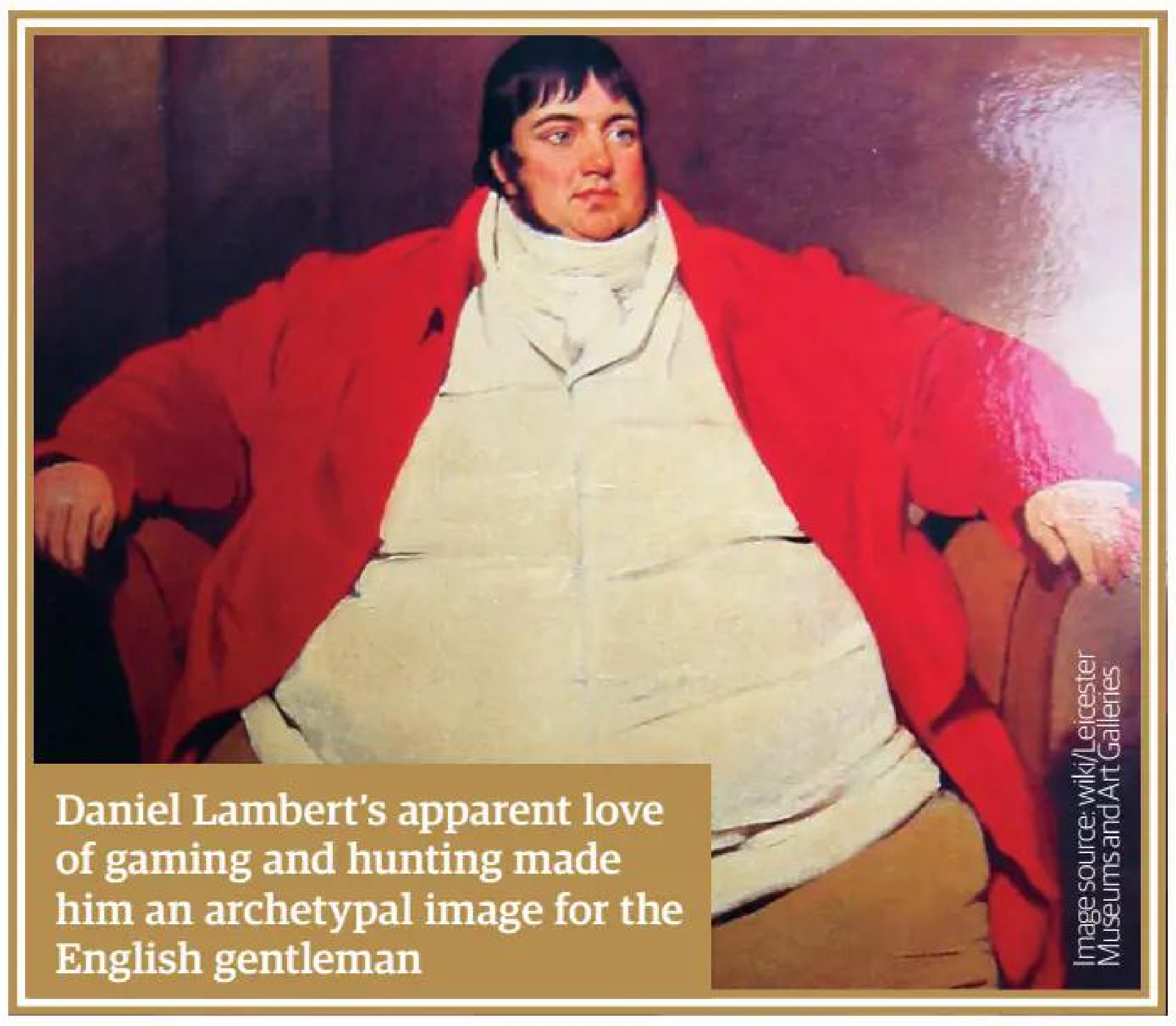

Daniel Lambert's apparent love of gaming and hunting made him an archetypal image for the English gentleman

Image source: wiki/Leicester Museums and Art Galleries

Seen with her parents, Anna Swan was about eight feet tall and her wedding to fellovzw giant Martin Bates made international

© Getty Images

a huge dose of arrogance it was billed as The Greatest Show On Earth! They crossed the Atlantic to England with a huge number of performers, a truly mouth-watering spectacle of vivid sounds, smells and colours. Clowns, horses, trapeze artists, exotic animals – and people – and, of course, an ever-expanding number of freaks. Except that now there was a new development to add to tantalise the senses – the Side Show. Flanking the main entrance to the Big Top, with huge colourful banners depicting the weird and wonderful exhibits, at the very tops of their voices talkers paced the platform and invited the crowds to step inside and see the wonders of the world! And now the 'born' freaks and the 'exotic' freaks were joined by the 'self-made freaks'. Sword swallowers, fire eaters, snake charmers, tattooed ladies, contortionists, strong men (and women) and performers who could pierce their bodies with swords and needles but feel no pain whatsoever.

It was an extravaganza like no other, at a price all could afford, with visitors invited to be up close with the performers, totally immersed in the outlandish experience and ready for the main event in the Big Top.

However, even now the cracks in the future of the freak show were beginning to appear. Many fairs around England were closed under vagrancy laws, cutting off the life blood of the travelling shows. In main cities equally strict councils banned public displays of freaks. One notable victim of this clampdown was Joseph Merrick, the famous Elephant Man, who was to be given refuge of sorts in the Royal London Hospital by Dr Frederick Treves. An act of kindness perhaps, although Treves' first act following Merrick's death was to dissect him and put his skeleton on display, a fate that also awaited many conjoined twins. All in the name of science, of course. And it was the rapidly growing field of medicine that was to take control of how freaks were perceived in society. By the latter part of the Victorian era the understanding of the human body, its functions and flaws, had improved immeasurably. Diseases of the flesh and of the mind now had names and therefore identities, and sufferers needed to be cared for in institutions, not put on public display. The myth and the marvel were gone, and with the early years of the 20th century came the gruesome terrors of modern warfare and its own brand of physical horror.

The public's appetite for such intrusive exhibition was fading and the world was being filled with more sophisticated, less disturbing and contentious entertainments. But like all good performers the freak shows had given their all to entertain, helping their audiences escape the drudgery of their ordinary lives and just feel good about themselves. And in that lies the real identity of the artists themselves; the inner humanity that shines through in spite of physical difference, and the empathy they had for their fellow human beings against all odds. We know the true stories and feelings of far too few of the men and women of the freak shows, and with time their tales and voices become ever fainter. It was an industry filled with sinister dark shadows, but in spite of this it was the performers themselves, their courage, their energy and their ability to face their difference with a special kind of dignity and grace that remains a lesson for us even to this day.

MEDICINE NOT MYSTERY

New understanding and new language for a new age

Proteus Syndrome

Suffered by Joseph Merrick, the famous Elephant Man. It's an over growth of bones, tissue, skin and organs resulting in the external growths that dominated his appearance

Microcephaly

A narrowing and reduction in the size of the skull. Sufferers were billed as 'Pin Heads' and in one famous case, simply as 'What Is It'?

Adenoma

A tumour of the pituitary gland that causes an excessive amount of growth hormone. It's more than likely the cause of most giantism of performers such as Anna Swan and her husband Martin Bates

Mental disability

Perhaps the most disturbing of all freak show conditions, where lack of mental development and learning difficulties were displayed through such acts as 'The Wild Men of Borneo'

Hyperrichosis

Bearded ladies were linked to this, but in the extreme cases it would result in performers such as Jo Jo the Dog Faced Boy.

Conjoined twins

The way their bodies were joined varied greatly. Some would share just ligaments but others would share organs and vital blood vessels, so their separation at this time would lead to certain death.

Written by Frances White

VICTORIAN CRIME

While overseas the British Empire was flourishing, in London, the city of fog, a grisly war was waging between the emerging criminal class and a fledging police force

As Queen Victoria ascended to power, England's influence over the world spread like a blot of spilt ink, and this dark mark seeped into the houses and alleyways of the country's overpopulated cities. Executions of dastardly criminals drew increasing crowds and headlines warned of the crime wave washing over the country. Thieves lingered in shaded alleys, there were violent acts of garrotting against the rich and influential, and a well-dressed man who killed for fun was known only by his eerie nickname, Jack the Ripper.

The industrial revolution with its smoke-spewing factories created a buzz of excitement in the cities, but life was not so full of opportunities for the lower-class workers. As more families flooded into the cramped cities, poverty thrived. It was soon followed by its frequent bedfellow, crime.

Rookeries sprung up around London – nests of winding alleys, dead ends and shadowed corners where thieves, prostitutes and cheats could scheme and fester. They were a den of gloomy places for criminals to hide, and a twisted maze in which to lose the police. One of the central breeding grounds for this new and dangerous class was the neighbourhood of Whitechapel, along with the surrounding areas of Bethnal Green, Wapping and Mile End, not to forget the ever-growing slums of Spitalfields. These run-down and over-populated places became cut off from the rest of the city, and crime flourished.

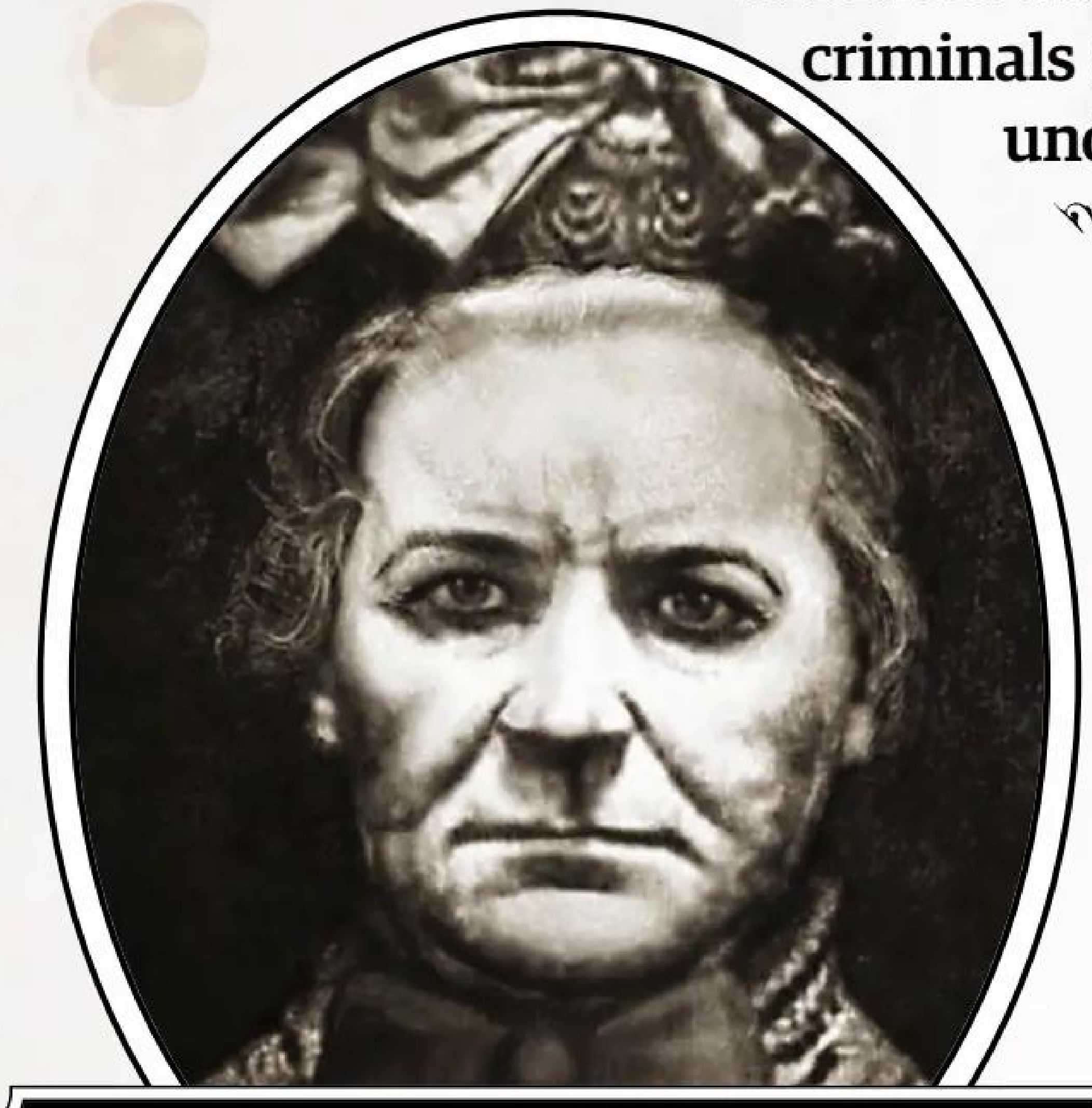
Children born in these dens of decay had little hope of leading an honest life, else face the cruel and dangerous conditions of the workhouse. Better to take a chance on the short and fast life of a criminal than the inevitable poverty that hung all around them like the thick black smoke that covered the city. Until 1870 there was no compulsory education, so orphaned, abandoned or poverty-stricken youngsters gained a very different set of skills on the streets.

As they grew up, the street urchins outgrew the silken handkerchiefs and measly rewards at the mercy of their masters. The common path for the older pickpocket was to join the swell mob. These older, experienced crooks were debonair criminals who earned the trust of their victims before bleeding them dry.

On paper, it seemed Victorian London was the safest period in the city's history, but in reality a lack of faith in the police left many crimes unreported, and all peace-loving citizens knew to keep their wits about them, else leave certain areas significantly lighter than they entered them.

Victoria's most wanted

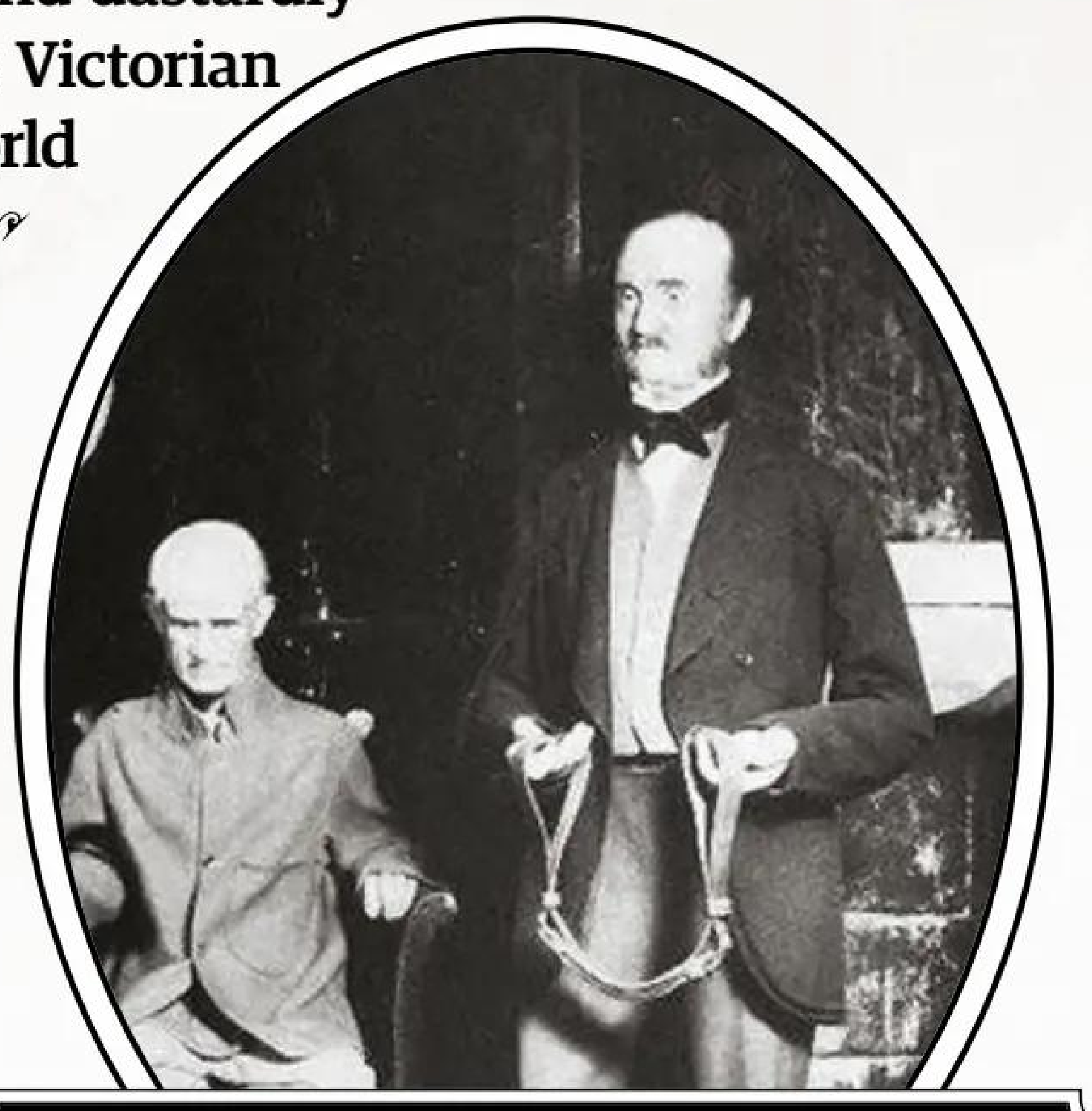
The most deadly and dastardly criminals of the Victorian underworld



Amelia Dyer

1837-96

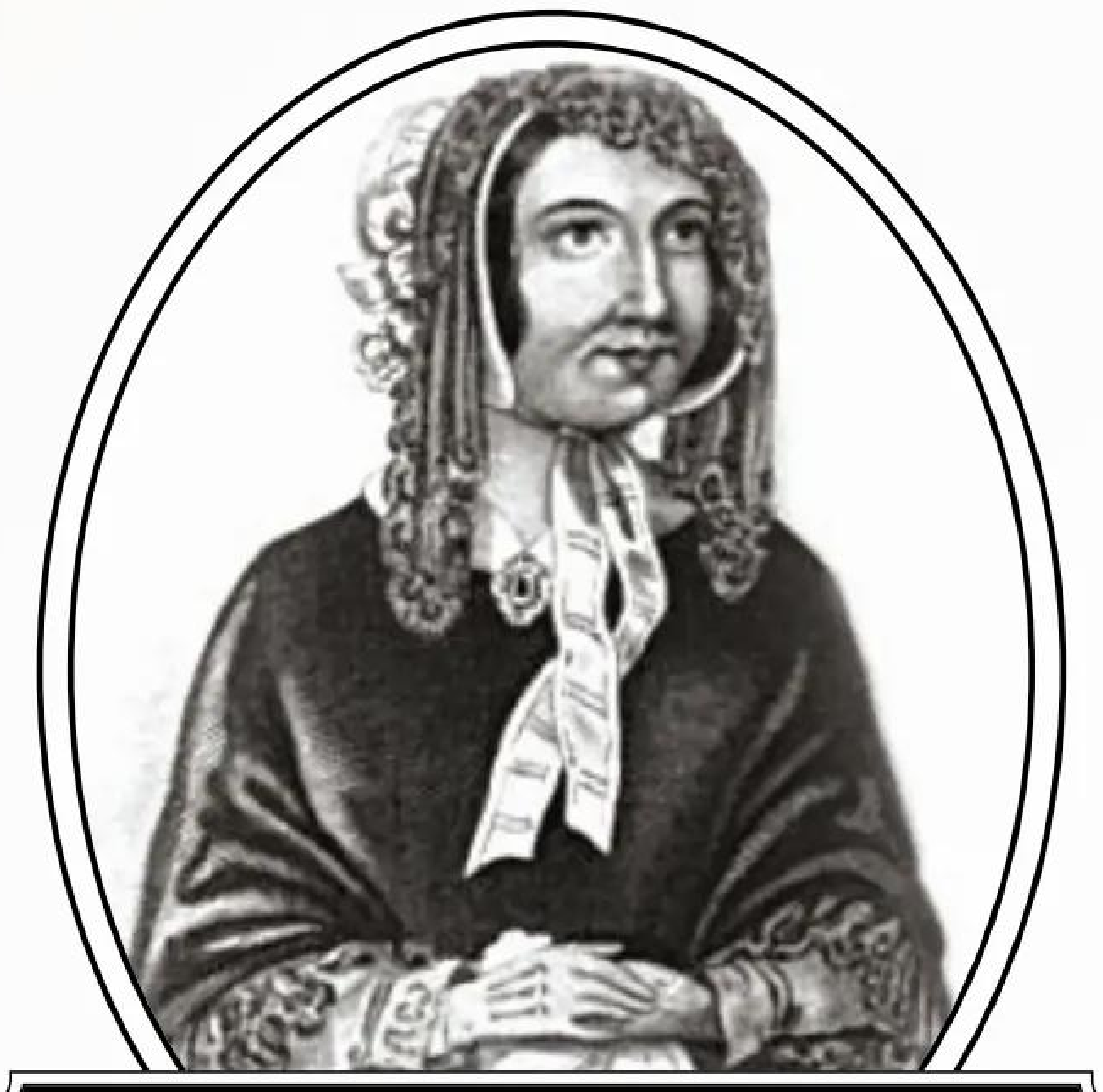
NICKNAMES Ogress of Reading, The Reading Baby Farmer
CRIME After training as a nurse for many years, Dyer opened her home to young pregnant women who had conceived out of wedlock. When the babies were born she promised the mothers she would provide a safe and loving home for a one-off payment. However, instead of providing homes, Dyer killed the children and pocketed the profits. Although she aroused suspicion, she was able to avoid detection thanks to various conveniently timed stays in mental hospitals. When her crimes were finally discovered, Dyer had been responsible for 200-400+ child deaths.
PUNISHMENT Hung from the neck until dead
LAST WORDS "I have nothing to say."



Charles Peace

1832-79

NICKNAME The Banner Cross Killer
CRIME Beginning with small robberies, Peace was in and out of jail throughout his life. In 1876, he killed a police officer while robbing a house, but instead William Habron was found guilty. Peace later became obsessed with a woman called Katherine Dyson. One night her husband caught him stalking her and Peace shot him dead. Peace was eventually arrested, despite attempting to escape by throwing himself from a train window.
PUNISHMENT Hung from the neck until dead
LAST WORDS "Sir, if I believed what you and the church say that you believe, even if England were covered with broken glass from coast to coast, I would walk over it […] and think it worth while living, just to save one soul from an eternal hell like that!"



Maria Manning

1821-49

NICKNAME Bermondsey Horror
CRIME Maria Manning was a Swiss domestic servant fascinated with the trappings of wealth, so decided she would marry a rich man to become a lady. She set her sights on Patrick O'Connor. However, she ended up marrying Frederick Manning, a poor railway guard who promised he was set to inherit a fortune. This was a lie, so Maria continued her affair with O'Connor, which Manning encouraged. The couple invited him over for dinner one evening after digging a grave under the kitchen floor. When he arrived, she shot him, but the wound was not fatal, and Manning battered him to death with a chisel.
PUNISHMENT Hung from the neck until dead
LAST WORDS None reported

William Palmer

1824-56

NICKNAMES The Rugeley Poisoner, The Prince of Poisoners
CRIME Palmer was involved in crime from an early age, facing allegations of stealing. He later became a doctor, but death seemed to follow Palmer – within weeks of his marriage to Anne Thornton, her wealthy mother was dead, and even four of his own children died mysteriously. In debt, Palmer took out life insurance on his wife and brother and they both died soon after. The murder of John Cook finally exposed Palmer. Cook was poisoned by Palmer, who then interfered with the post mortem. Despite this, poisoning by strychnine was ruled as the cause of death and Palmer found guilty. It is believed he killed 14 people.
PUNISHMENT Hung from the neck until dead
LAST WORDS "Cook did not die from strychnine."

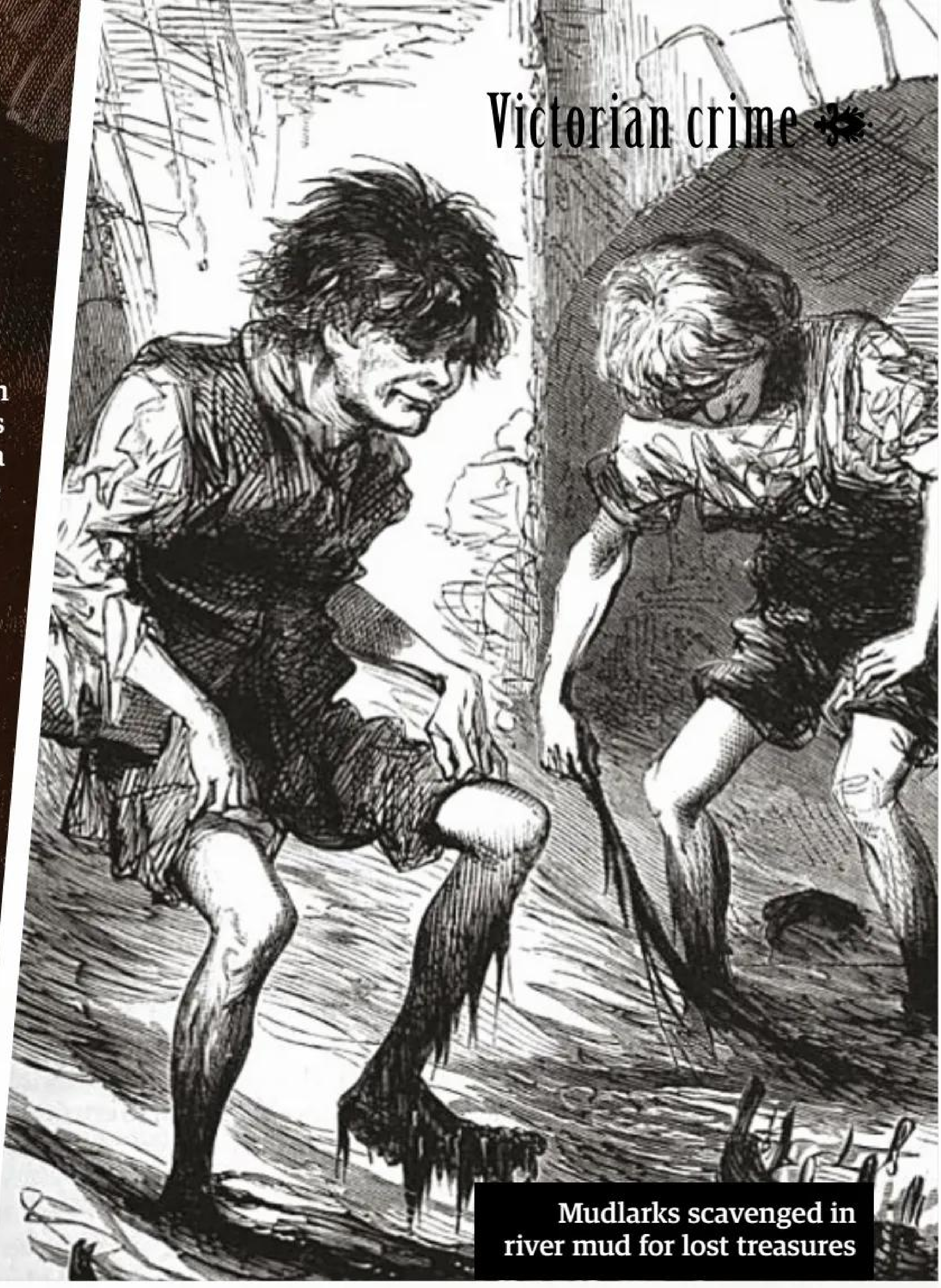
Criminal slang

A guide to the popular slang terms of Victorian London

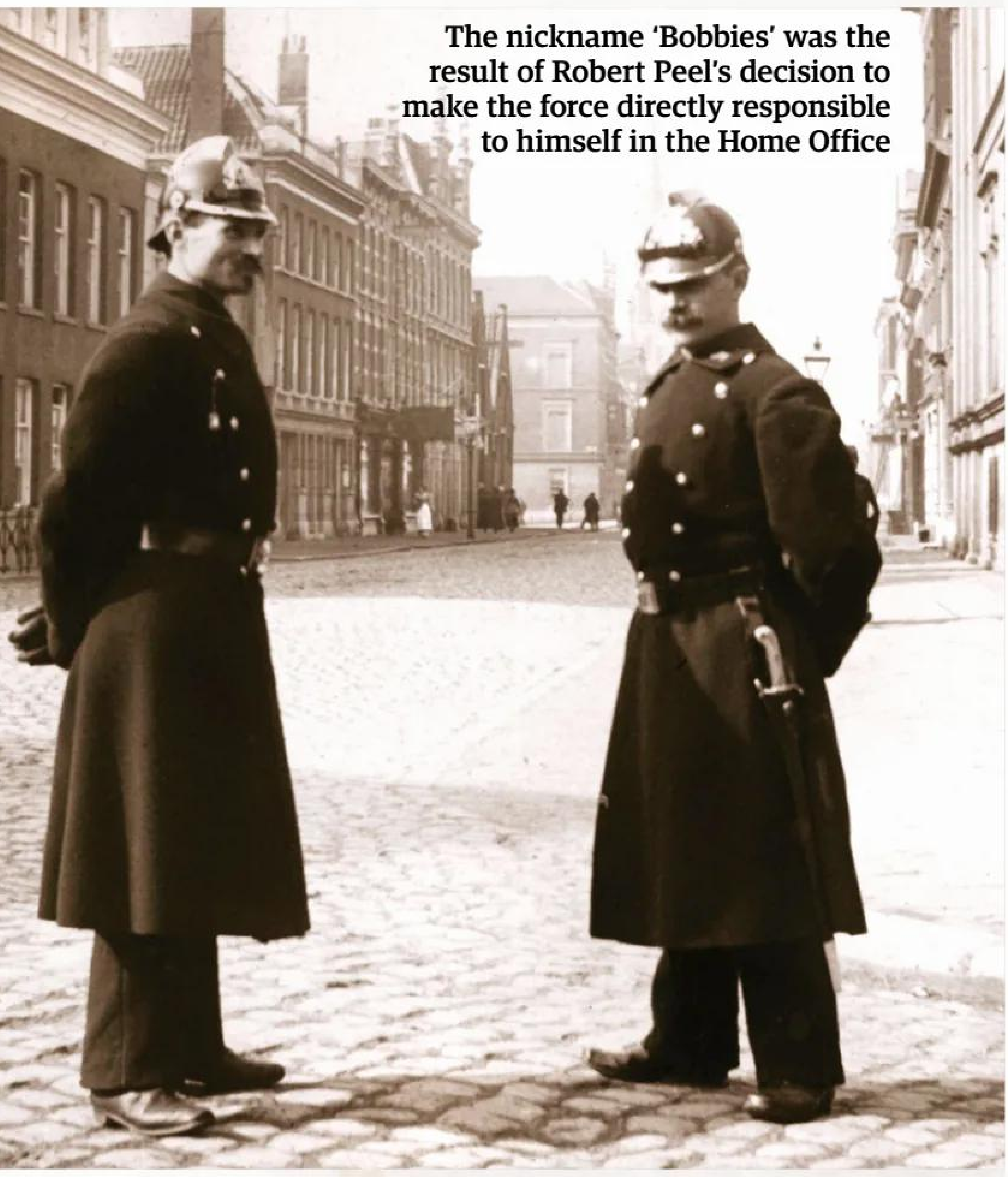
AREA-SNEAK: Opportunistic burglar
BEARER UP: Someone who uses a female accomplice to distract men while they rob them
BLUE BOTTLE: Policemen
BONNETING: Tipping a man's hat over his head to make him easier to mug
BROADSMAN: A cardsharp
BUG-HUNTERS: People who rob drunks, usually at night
BUTTONER: A sharper's assistant, usually entices the targets
CRACKSMAN: A burglar or safecracker, a thief who breaks locks
DRAGSMAN: A thief who targets occupants of carriages
FLASH HOUSE: A public house that serves as the hangout of criminals
GONOPHS: Child thieves
HOISTERS: Shoplifters
KIDSMAN: Someone in charge of a troupe of child thieves
MAGSMAN: Confidence tricksters, usually inferior
MALTOOLER: A pickpocket who steals from those riding the omnibus
PRIG: A thief
RAMPSMEN: A hoodlum
ROOKERY: A slum
SHARPER: A swindler, usually involved in rigged card games
SMASHERS/SHOFULMEN: Counterfeiters
SMATTER Hauling: stealing handkerchiefs from men
SPEELERS: Gamblers
SWELL MOB: Elite pickpockets, usually well dressed and appearing respectable
THE FAMILY: The criminal underworld
THIMBLE-RIGGER: A con man who dupes people with the shell game – where an item is hidden under one of three cups

Source: Wikipedia Commons © Public Domain; Alamy; Corbis

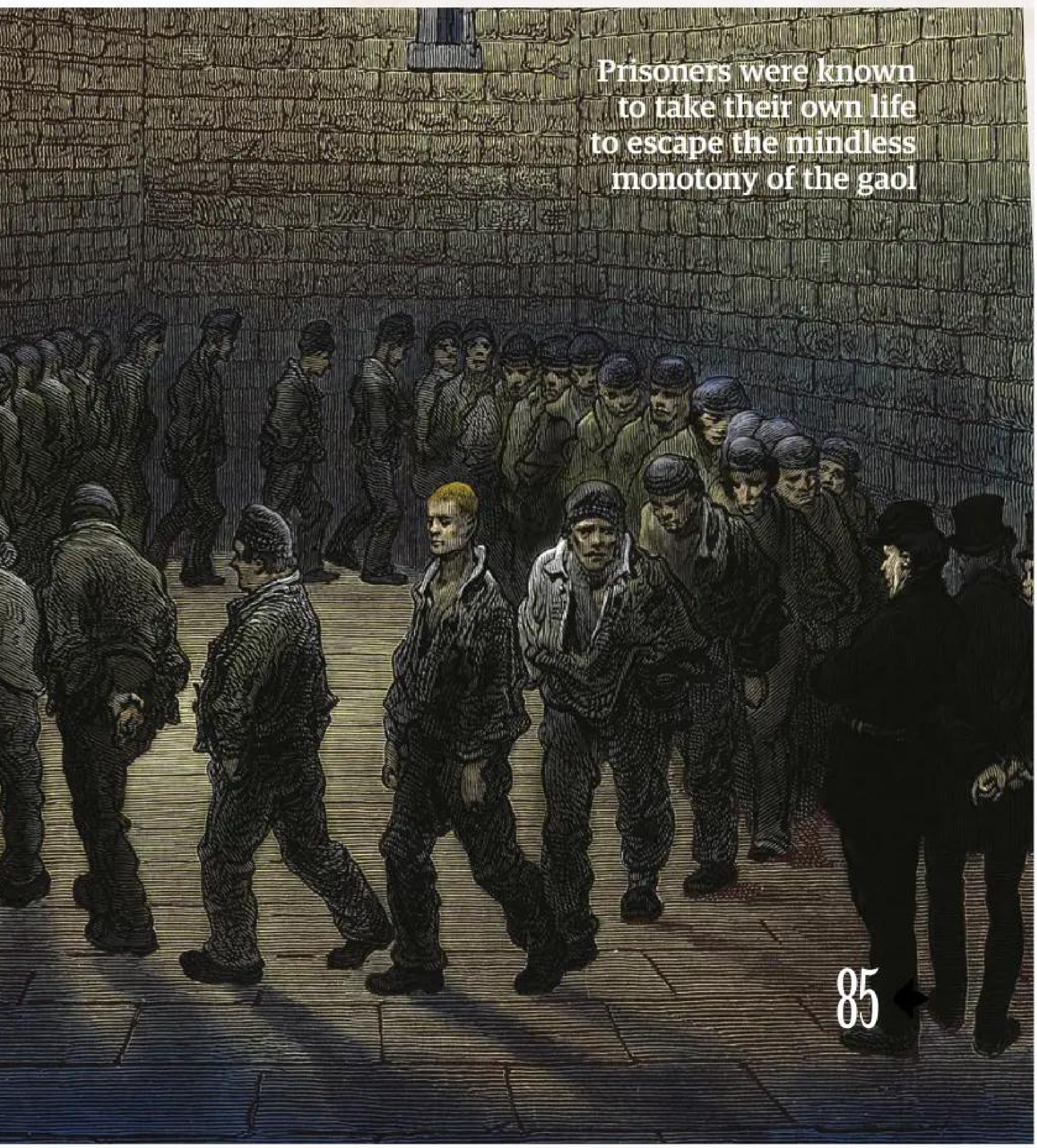
The Metropolitan Police Force was established after a sharp rise in crime in Victorian London



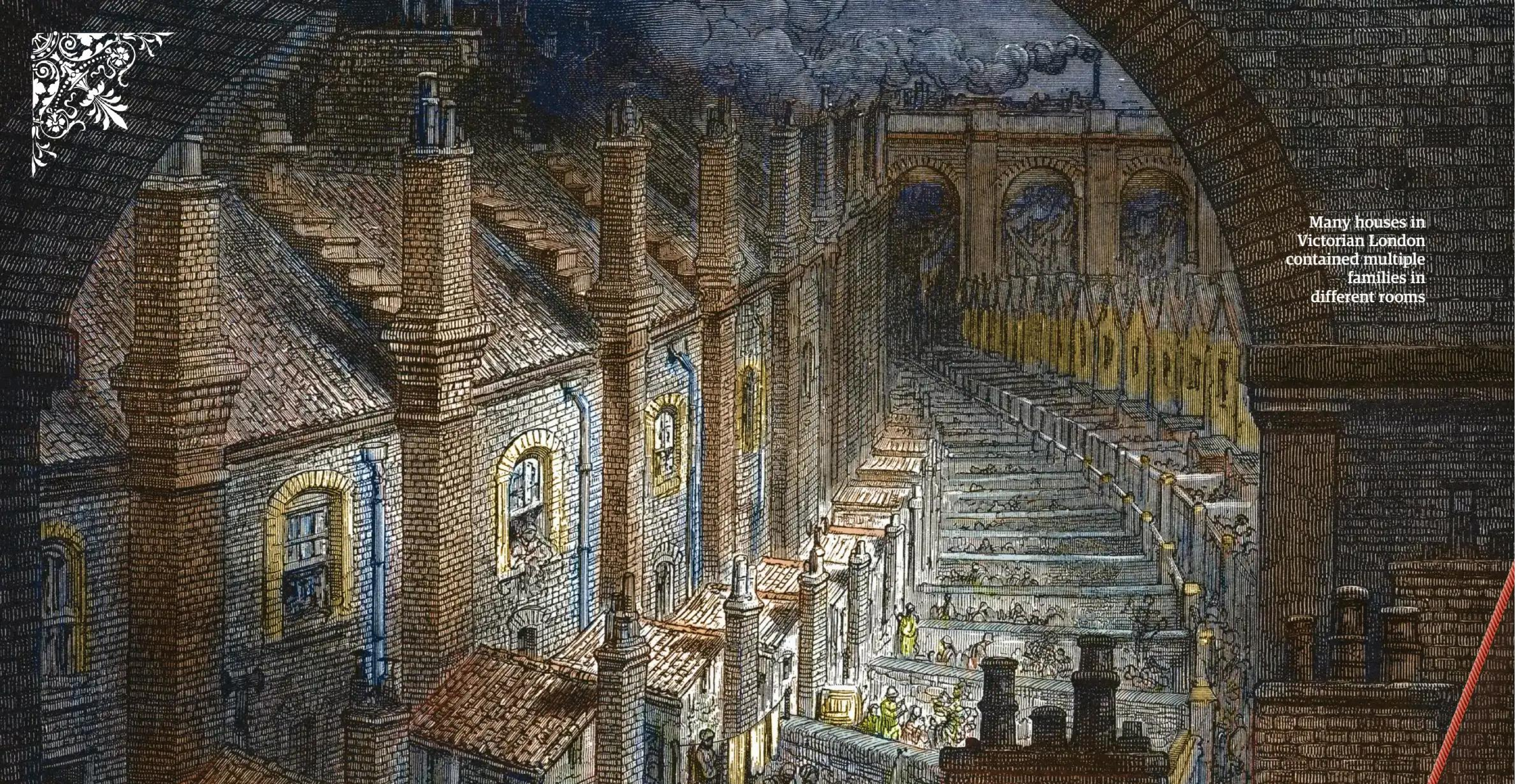
Mudlarks scavenged in river mud for lost treasures



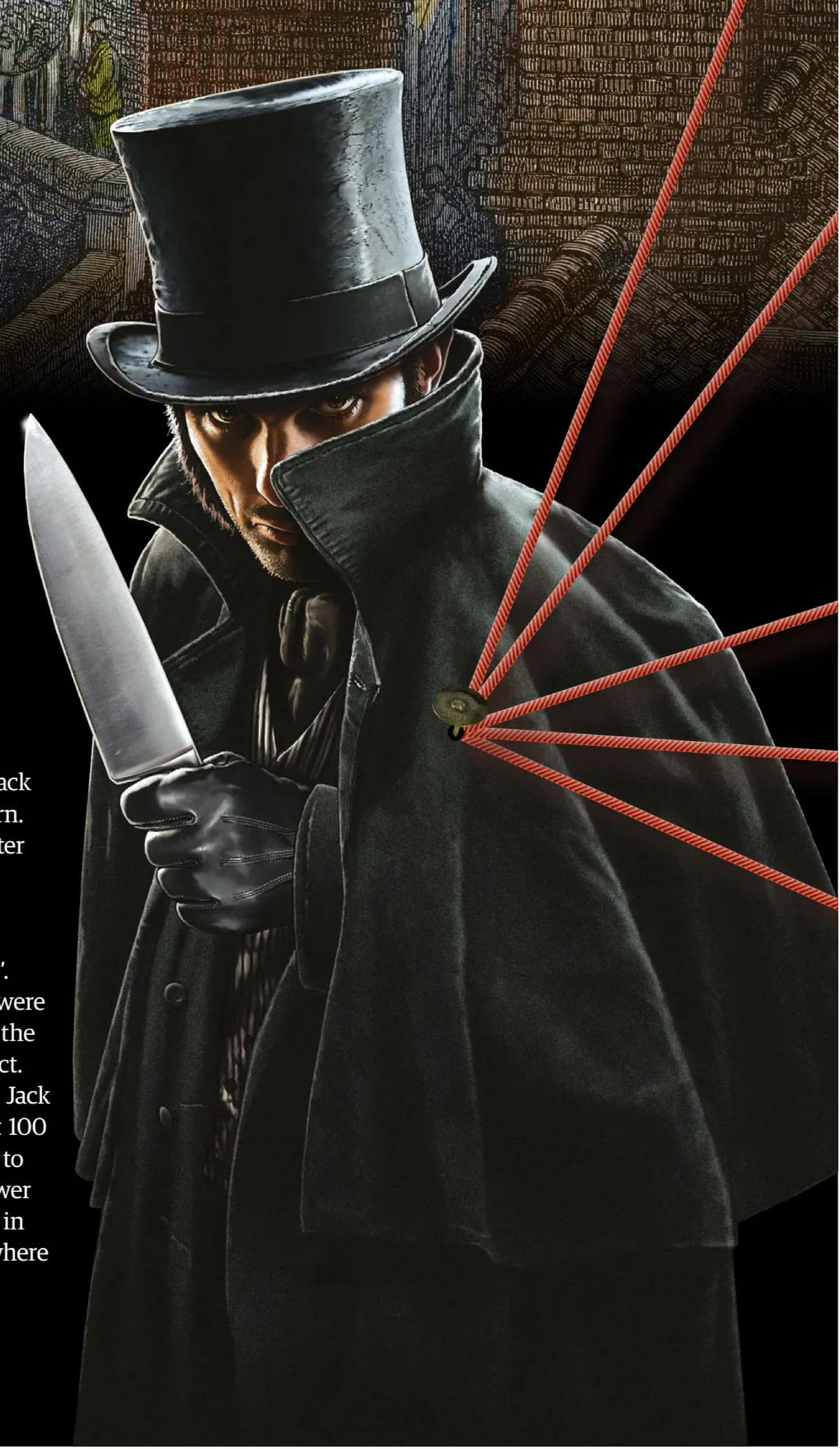
The nickname 'Bobbies' was the result of Robert Peel's decision to make the force directly responsible to himself in the Home Office



Prisoners were known to take their own life to escape the mindless monotony of the gaol



Many houses in Victorian London contained multiple families in different rooms



Who was Jack the Ripper?

Unsolved murders in 19th-century London were not uncommon. The vast majority of victims were prostitutes, and the bodies of these fallen women were found so often that it's impossible to estimate just how many were murdered. But there was one set of prostitute murders so sinister and horrifying that the mystery surrounding the killer's identity fascinates people to this day.

When the corpse of Mary Ann Nichols was discovered on 31 August 1888, it was butchered so horrifically that it was deemed the work "of a madman." It was treated as yet another prostitute murder until a week later a similarly butchered corpse was found. The police soon realised they weren't dealing with a random act of violence, but a serial killer. As the horrors of the murders filled the headlines, the police received a mysterious letter signed by 'Jack the Ripper', and the dark legend was born.

As the murders continued, suspect after suspect was arrested and then released. The Whitechapel murders dominated the newspapers and the police seemed constantly one step behind 'saucy Jacky'. First butchers were accused, then Jews were in the spotlight, next anyone with even the faintest link to a victim became a suspect.

Then suddenly, and without warning, Jack vanished into the shadows. For the next 100 years people have continued to attempt to determine his true identity, but the answer to this mystery seems to have been lost in the dark and winding Victorian slums where he claimed his victims.

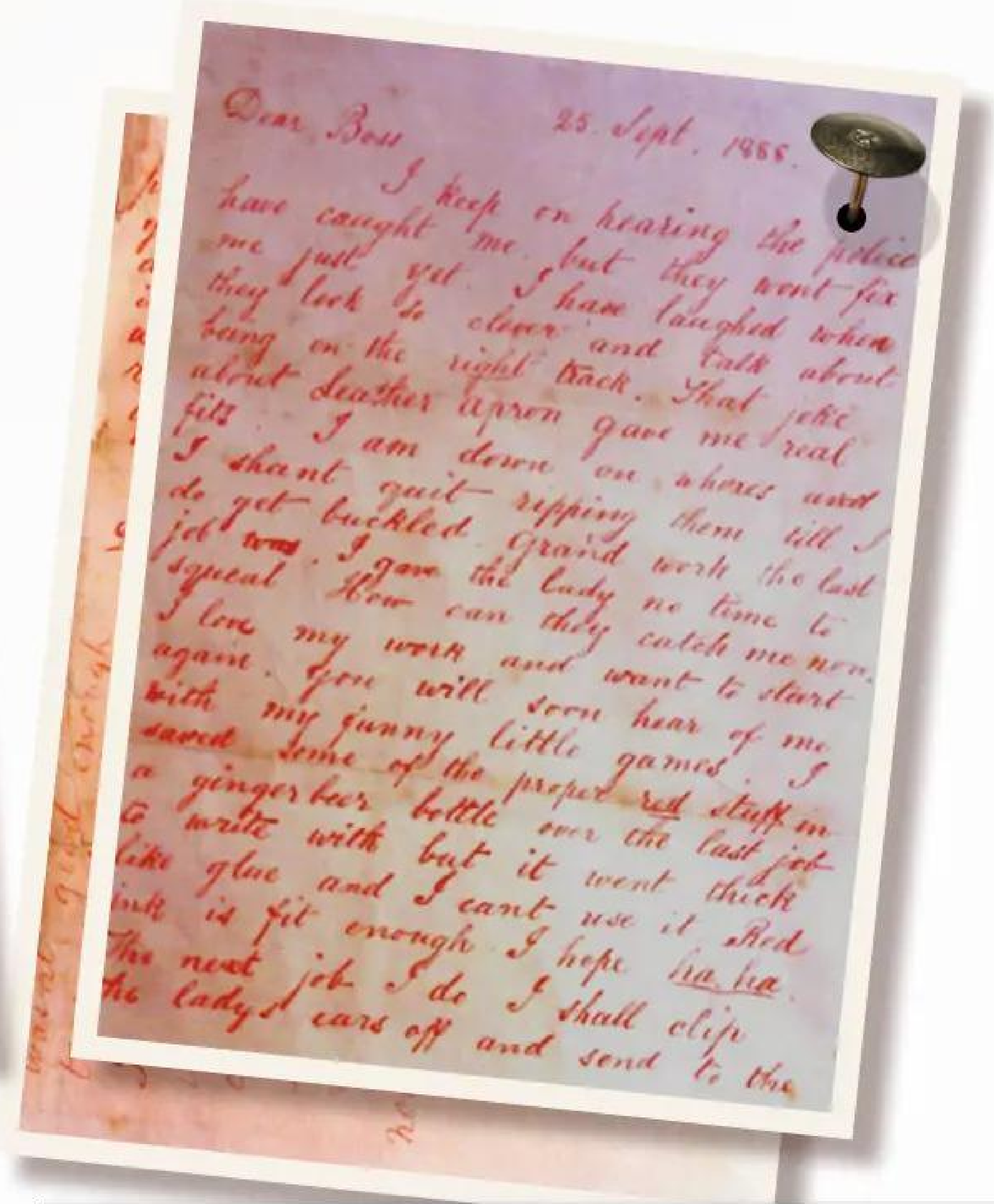
Details © Getty Images

Prince Albert Victor 1864-92

PROFESSION: Prince
PROPOSED MOTIVE: Driven mad by syphilis, killed to hide illegitimate child

Elizabeth Stride

BODY DISCOVERED: 1am, 30 September 1888
LOCATION: Dutfield's Yard, Berner Street
WOUNDS: Cut throat



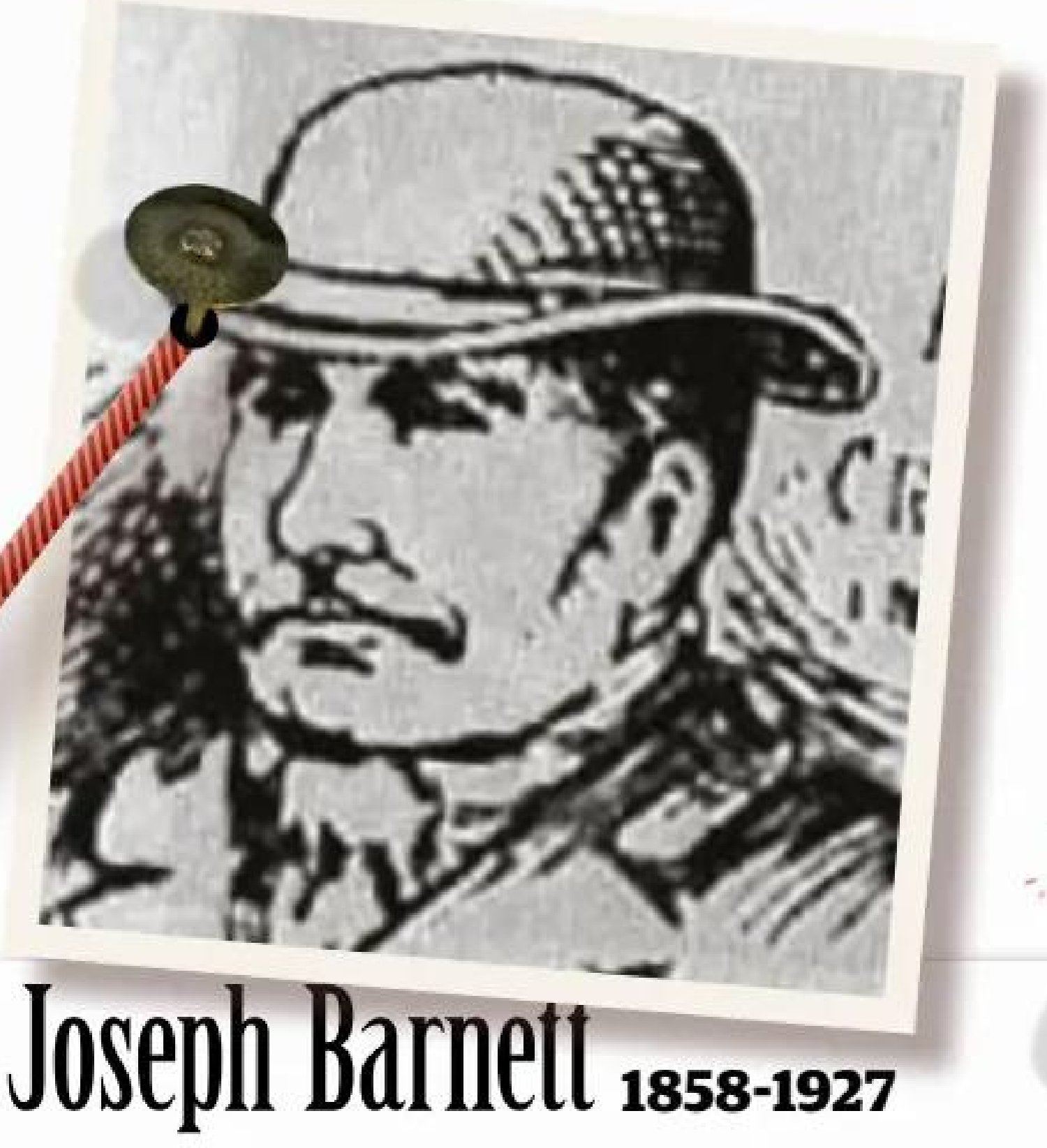
Dear Boss 25 Sept. 1888.
I keep on hearing the police have caught me but they wont fix me just yet. I have laughed when they look so clever and talk about being on the right track. That joke about Leather Apron gave me real fits. I am down on whores and I shant quit ripping them till I do get buckled. Grand work the last job was. I gave the lady no time to squeal. How can they catch me now. I love my work and want to start again. You will soon hear of me with my funny little games. I saved some of the proper red stuff in a ginger beer bottle over the last job to write with but it went thick like glue and I cant use it. Red ink is fit enough I hope ha. ha. The next job I do I shall clip the lady's ears off and send to the

Mary Jane Kelly

BODY DISCOVERED: 10.45am, 9 November 1888
LOCATION: 13 Miller's Court, Spitalfields
WOUNDS: Cut throat, abdomen emptied of most organs, heart missing, face mutilated

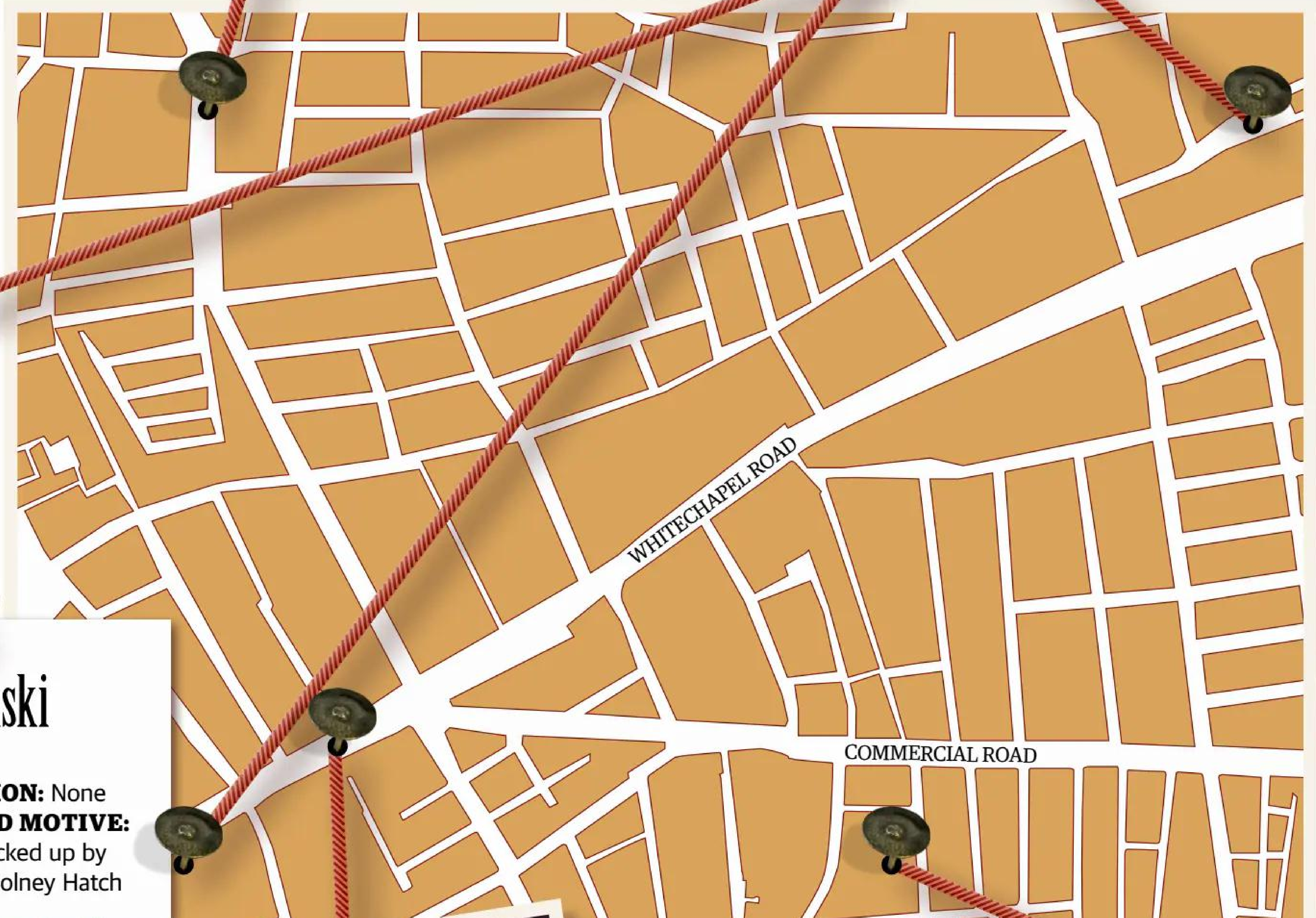
Annie Chapman

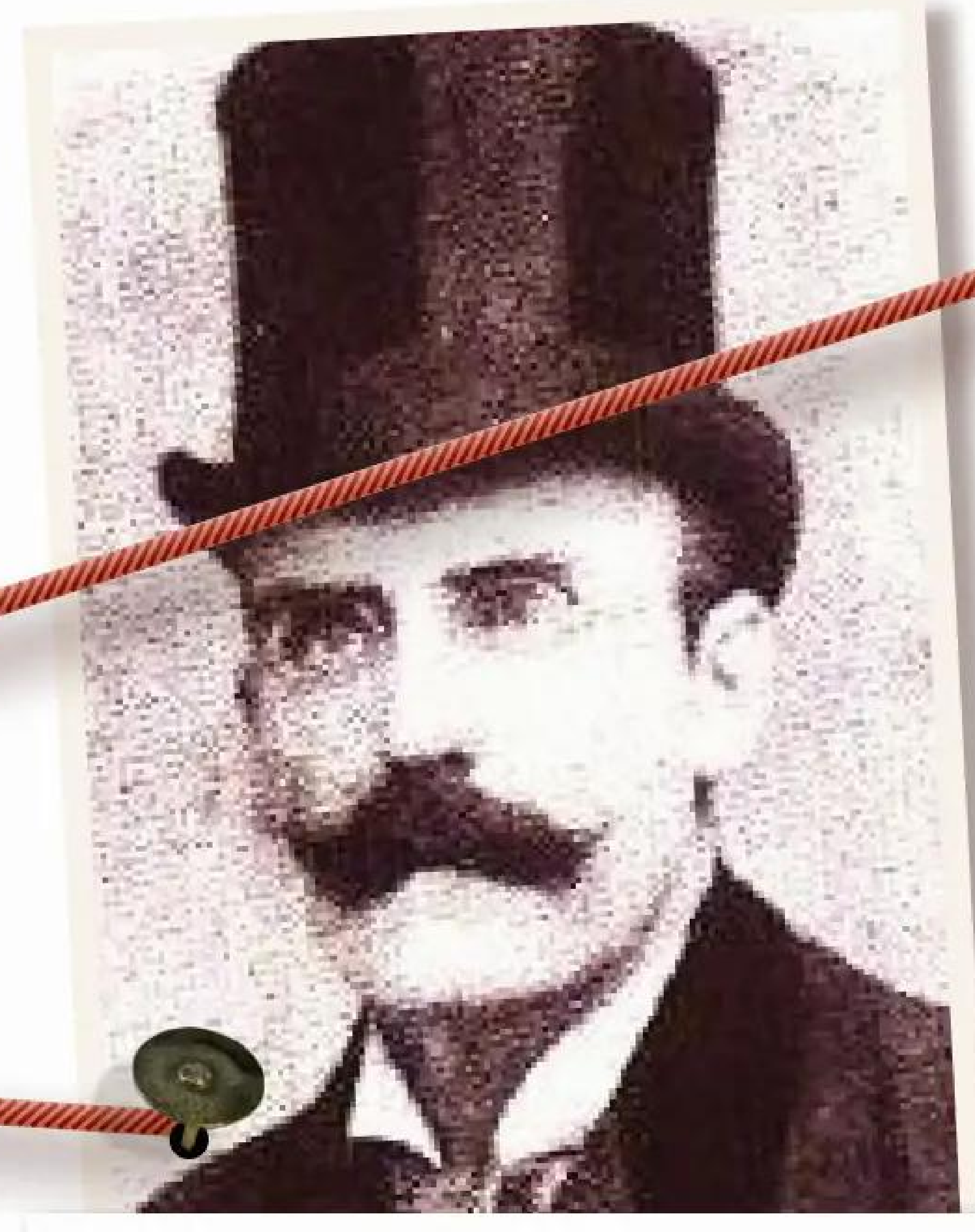
BODY DISCOVERED: 6am, 8 September 1888
LOCATION: 29 Hanbury Street
WOUNDS: Cut throat, abdomen ripped open, uterus removed



Joseph Barnett 1858-1927

PROFESSION: Fish porter
PROPOSED MOTIVE: Obsessively in love with the prostitute Mary Kelly and killed others to scare her off the streets

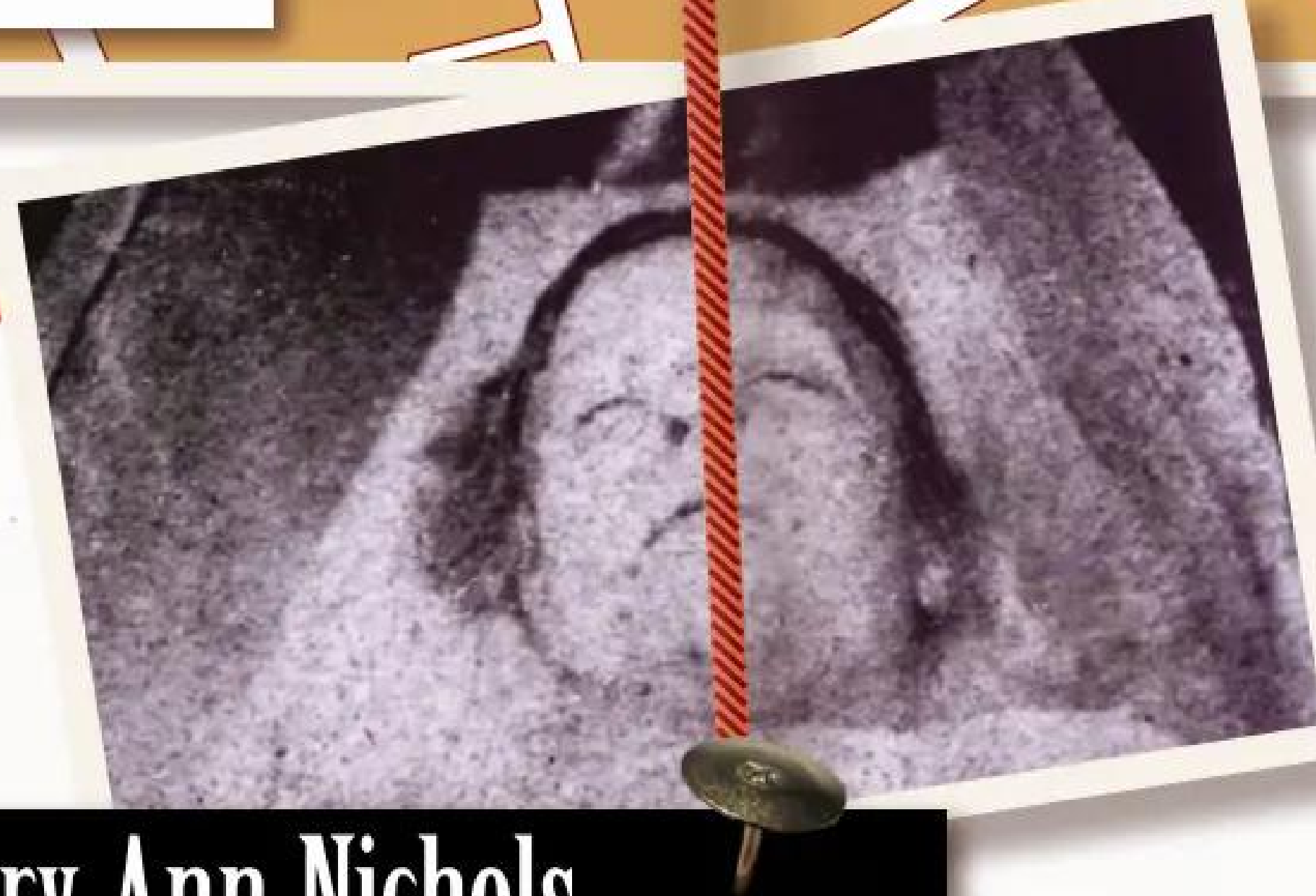




Aaron Kosminski

1865-1919

PROFESSION: None
PROPOSED MOTIVE: Insanity, backed up by his stay in Colney Hatch



Dr Thomas Neill Cream 1850-92

PROFESSION: Abortion doctor
PROPOSED MOTIVE: General sadistic tendencies, his supposed last words were "I am Jack the…"

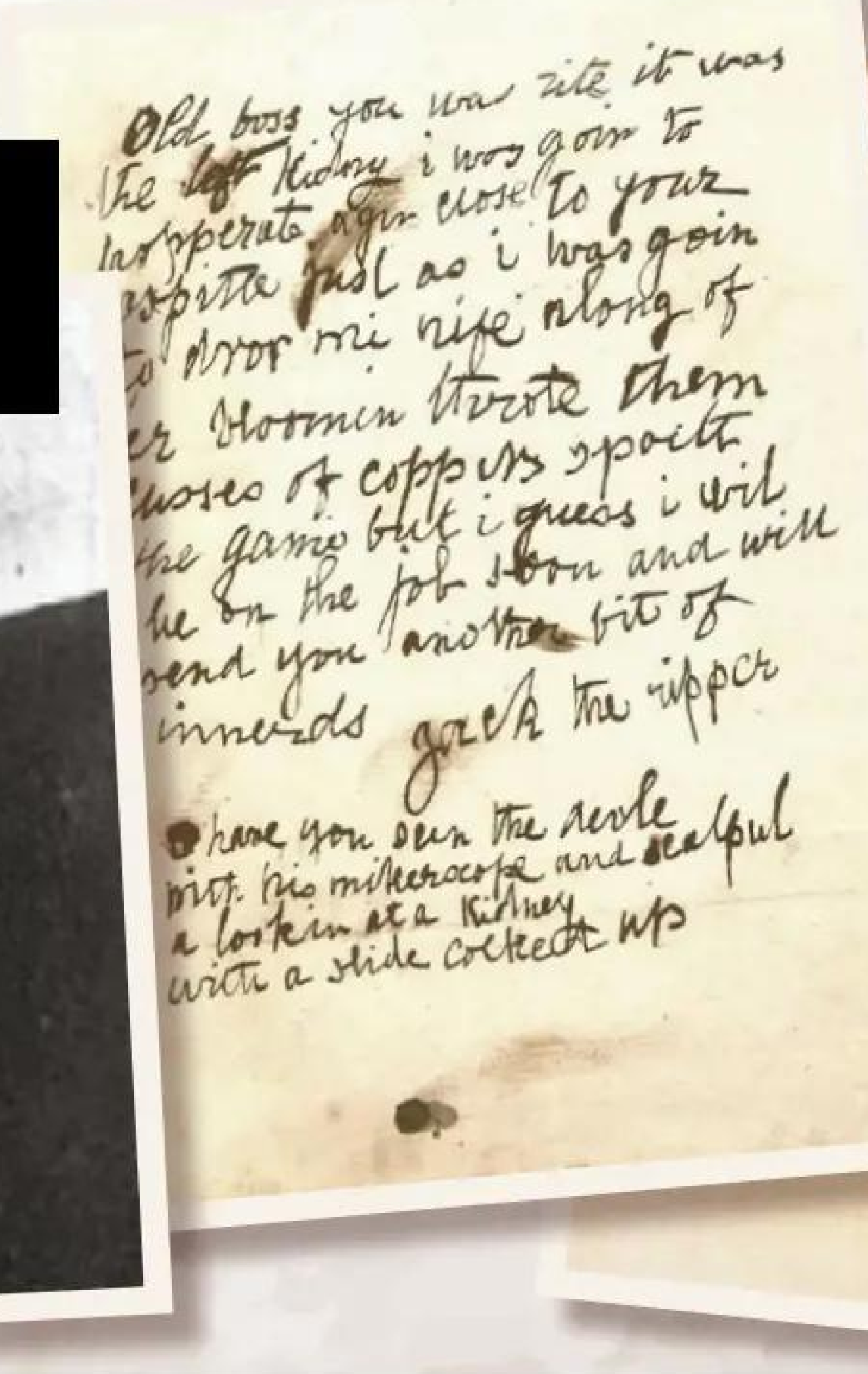
Catherine Eddowes

BODY DISCOVERED: 1.45am, 30 September 1888
LOCATION: Mitre Square
WOUNDS: Cut throat, abdomen ripped open, left kidney and most of uterus removed, face mutilated

Mary Ann Nichols

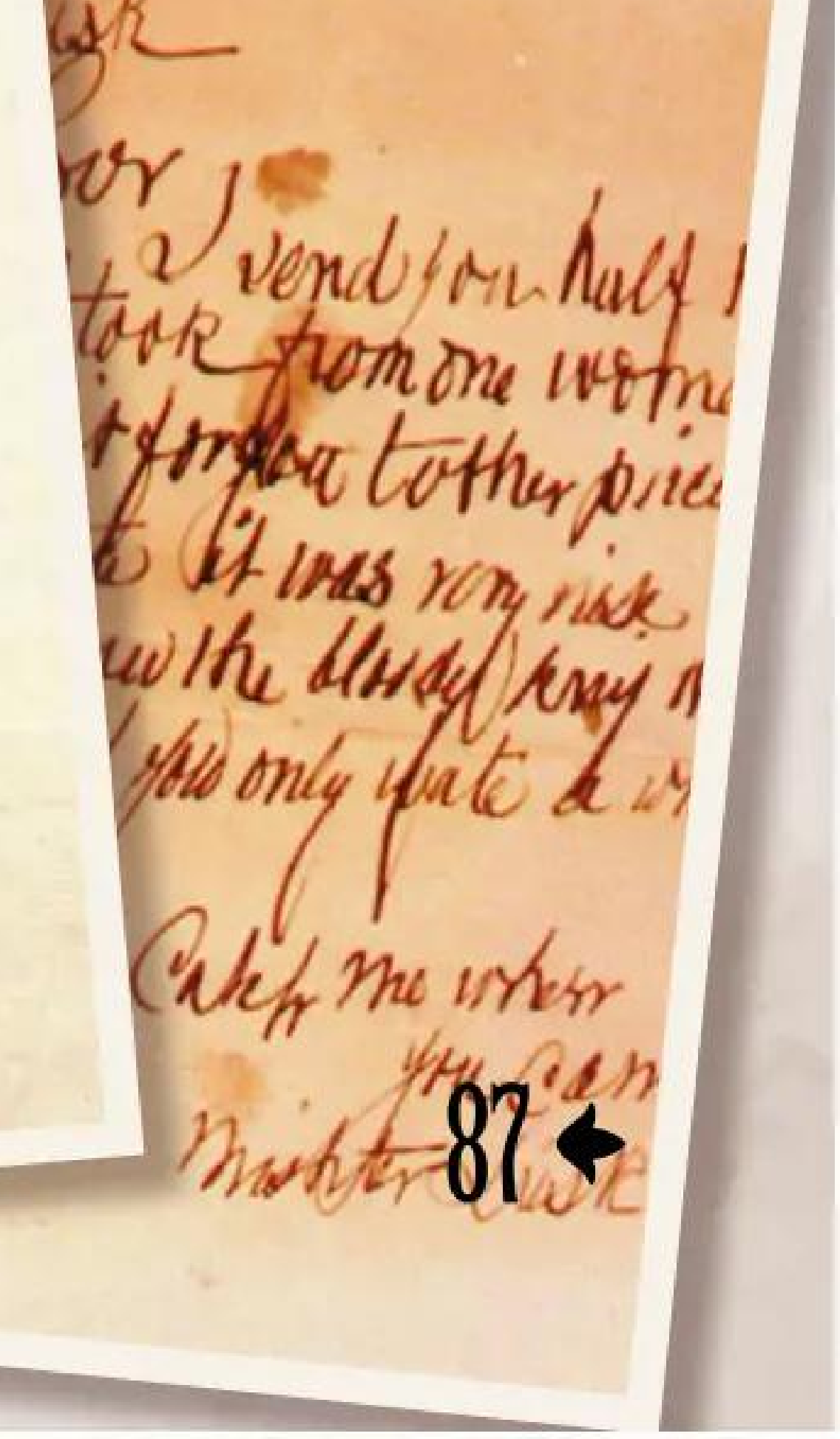
BODY DISCOVERED: 3.40am, 31 August 1888
LOCATION: Buck's Row, Whitechapel
WOUNDS: Cut throat, abdomen ripped open, many other incisions

Miller's Court, where Mary Jane Kelly's body was found butchered



Old boss you was rite it was the ~~left~~ kidny i was goin to hoperate agin close to your ospitle just as i was goin to dror mi nife along of er bloomin throte them cusses of coppers spoilt the game but i guess i wil be on the job soon and will send you another bit of innerds
jack the ripper

O have you seen the devle with his mikerscope and scalpul a lookin at a kidney with a slide cocked up



rom hell
sk
or
I send you half
took from one wom
t for you tother piec
it was very nise
ou the bloody knif
you only wate a w

Catch me when
you can
Mishter Lusk

Source: Wikipedia Commons © Public Domain

© Alamy

Walking the wheel

Many Victorian prisons were fitted with a treadmill, upon which prisoners would spend hours grinding flour in order to earn their keep. In one gruelling eight-hour shift, prisoners would climb the equivalent of 2,200m (7,200ft). By the end of the 19th century, the task of grinding grain had been handed over to factories, but the prisons kept their treadmills and used them as a form of punishment.

On 20 July 1829, Peel approved the establishment of a force of 895 constables, 88 sergeants, 20 inspectors and 8 superintendents

Birth of the Metropolitan police

As crime became organised and social disorder grew, it put an immense strain on the dated Tudor system of policing. Prior to the Metropolitan Police Act introduced by home secretary Robert Peel in 1829, small parishes and market towns only had a constable and the local watch and ward to maintain order. Meanwhile, in London, the bow street runners, part publicly funded detectives, became the first incarnation of what is known today as a professional police force. When Peel's Metropolitan Police Force took to the streets of London in 1829, it was to a city very much in need of law and order.

1,000 new policemen were hired to supplement the existing 400. They were given weekly pay and distinctive bottle-blue uniforms; policing became a full-time profession with one central goal – the detection and prevention of crime. The force was specially designed to represent a neutral good – they were distanced from the military and were armed only with a truncheon and rattle (though some did later carry flintlock pistols). Despite Peel's best efforts, the police were initially not well liked. Many citizens saw them as a threat to civil liberties and they earned unfavourable nicknames such as 'blue devils' and 'Peel's bloody gang'. Despite their focus being to prevent disorder, many policemen were attacked, impaled, blinded and even killed. Even with the thorough selection process wannabe officers underwent, many of them were arrested for being drunk on duty, while others were found guilty of corruption. The very first policeman, given the number one, was sacked after just four hours on the job for drunkenness.

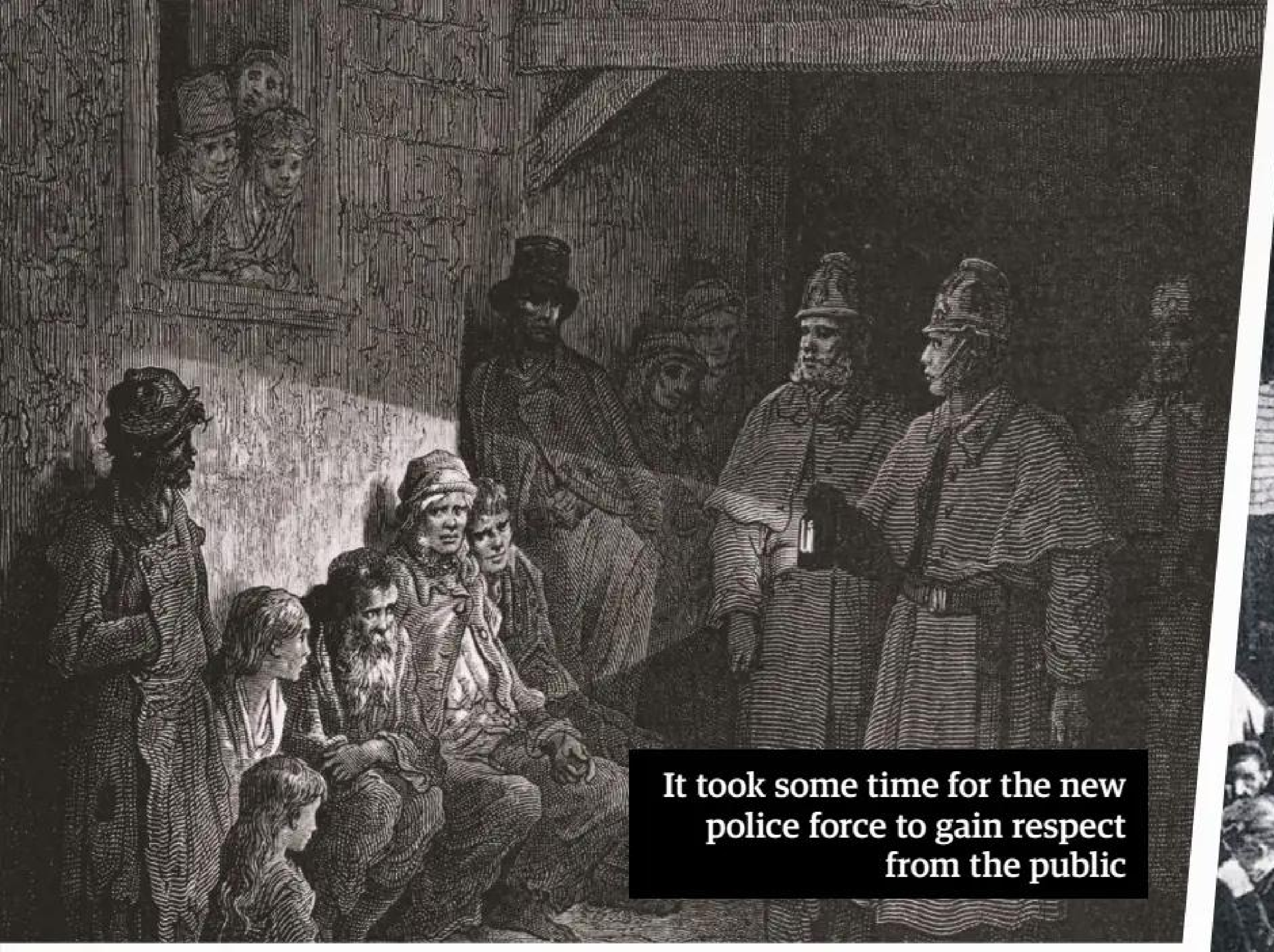
Despite the negative public reaction, the preventative measures used by the police were successful and crime did appear to decline. It is certain that the presence of police dissuaded criminals, but often this merely pushed them into the areas of London where the police did not operate. Wandsworth attracted so many criminals eager to escape the law that it became known as 'Black Wandsworth'. Many boroughs in England and Wales as a whole were hesitant to set up their own forces, and by 1848, 22 boroughs still had no official police force. Although implementation was slow, eventually police forces spread across the country, and in 1856, 73,240 people were arrested in London alone.

For those found guilty, a combination of backbreaking work and mind-numbing monotony awaited in the gaols. The Victorian era was a time of dramatic change in the prison system and new techniques were being employed across the country. Hulks – old sailing ships originally used to hold prisoners to be transported – were increasingly used to house ordinary prisoners. Conditions on the hulks were horrific and cholera was rife as filthy polluted water from the Thames was used for washing and drinking. Techniques of isolation and segregation were employed to encourage reflection. At Pentonville Prison (dubbed a 'convict academy'), prisoners were stripped of their names and referred to by their cell numbers on a brass badge pinned to their chest. They wore a brown cloth cap with a mask that covered their faces – their voices and stories hidden from the world.

Hard labour was first employed as a way to encourage productivity from prisoners, with the treadmill, a large cylinder with steps that the prisoners monotonously climbed for up to eight hours a day, producing

It was not uncommon for officers' rattles to be used against them

© Alamy; Corbis



It took some time for the new police force to gain respect from the public

Crime & punishment

Arson	15 years' transportation
Abandoning family	21 days' hard labour
Stealing onions	Seven years' penal servitude
Begging	21 days' hard labour
Murder	Hanged from the neck until dead
Assault	21 days' imprisonment
Trespassing	One month's hard labour/ fined 27 shillings
Stealing a waistcoat	6 months' hard labour

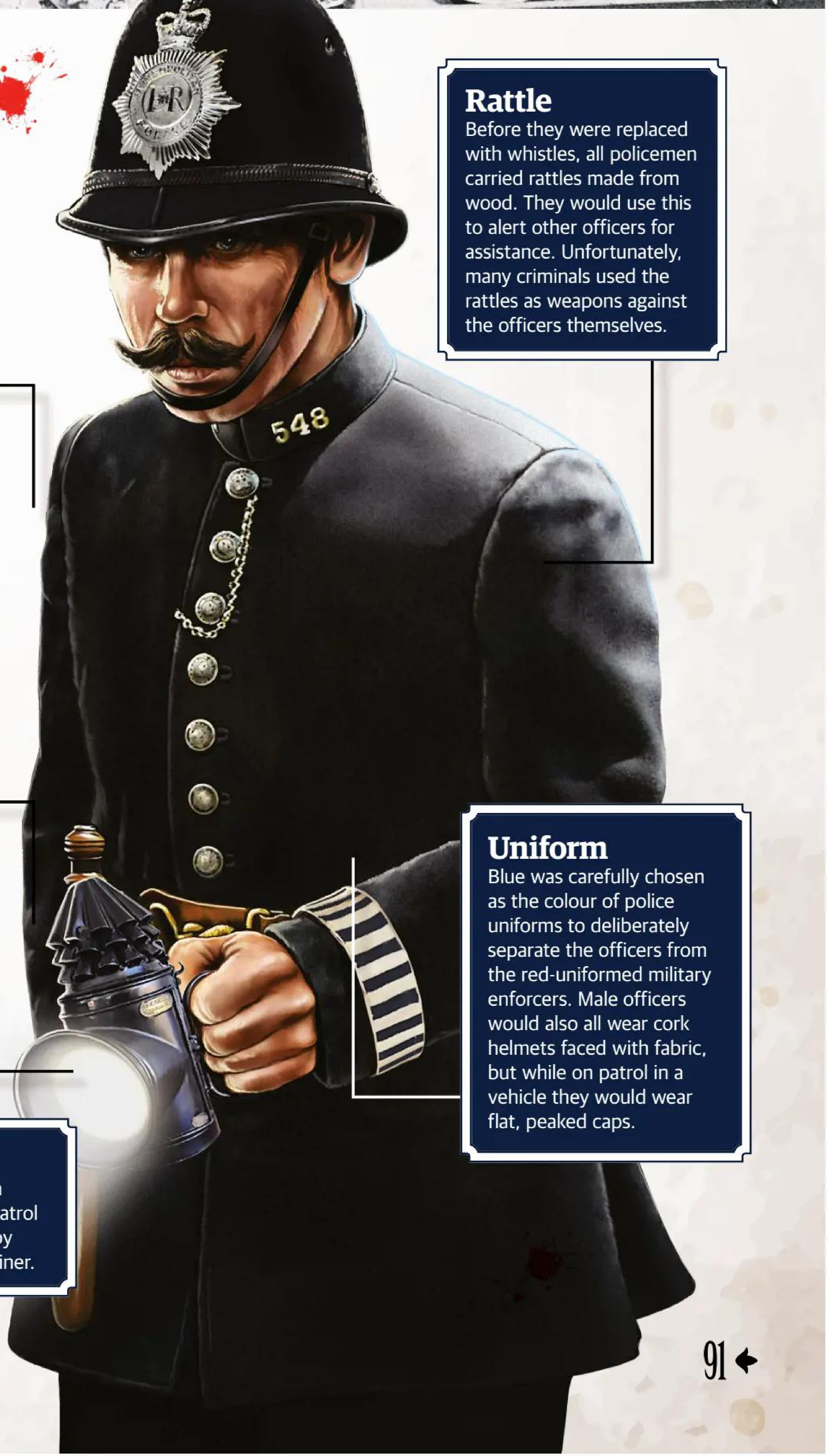
flour for the prison to sell. However, in the later part of the 19th century, there was no end product for this back-breaking task and it, along with a host of other mindless exercises, was designed only to degrade and break the prisoners' spirits. The gaols wished to establish themselves as a spectre of pain and suffering to deter criminals. Because the poor outside were suffering under terrible conditions, the government were keen that the prisons represented a bleaker outlook than the workhouse.

But the cold, bare cells of the gaols were preferable to the grim image of the hangman's noose. Public hangings attracted large crowds up to the day they were outlawed. In one particularly grisly case, the condemned William Bousfield avoided execution by mounting his feet on the sides of the drop. After four more unsuccessful attempts, the hangman leapt into the pit beneath the scaffold and hung on to the prisoner's legs.

Gradually, as the century came to a close, more liberal ideas of reform began to play a part in penal policy, with doctors and psychiatrists interacting closely with prisoners. However, it would take some time for the authorities to regard criminals as more than simply an incurable social evil.

For many, the dangers of a life of crime were preferable to being sent to the workhouse

Anatomy of a Victorian policeman



Truncheon
Early truncheons were heavily decorated and seen as proof of identification for the officers. They also featured the monarch's crown and name of the police force. Truncheons were not replaced by identifying warrant cards until the 1890s.

Rattle
Before they were replaced with whistles, all policemen carried rattles made from wood. They would use this to alert other officers for assistance. Unfortunately, many criminals used the rattles as weapons against the officers themselves.

Handcuffs
All policemen were equipped with two pairs of 'D' cuffs, named for the shape that resembled the letter. These handcuffs came in two sizes – one designed for arresting adults, and the other in a child-friendly size for young lawbreakers.

Uniform
Blue was carefully chosen as the colour of police uniforms to deliberately separate the officers from the red-uniformed military enforcers. Male officers would also all wear cork helmets faced with fabric, but while on patrol in a vehicle they would wear flat, peaked caps.

Bull's-eye lantern
Due to the lack of streetlights on Victorian streets, officers would carry a lantern to patrol the city at night. The lantern was ignited by lighting a wick resting in an oil-filled container.

INTO OBLIVION

Moral decay and debauchery in Victorian Britain's opium dens

Written by Callum McKelvie

Through the gloom one could dimly catch a glimpse of bodies lying in strange fantastic poses, bowed shoulders, bent knees, heads thrown back, and chins pointing upward, with here and there a dark, lack-lustre eye turned upon the newcomer".

– Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Man with the Twisted Lip*, December 1891

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's vivid description of a 19th century opium den in this story from *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* is just one of many such portrayals that captured the British public's imagination. Dark, sinister establishments where opium addicts gathered to partake of the pipe. Since being outlawed under the 1920 Drug Laws, opium has developed a reputation as a curiously Victorian narcotic – despite the global illegal trade in the substance still being highly lucrative. Indeed, in 2022 the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reported that opium farming in Afghanistan was responsible for 80 per cent of global opiate demand, before a Taliban-imposed ban that same year cut the country's production by 95 per cent.

Bottles of Elixir of Opium. Whilst the above examples are from the USA, similar items would have been readily available on the streets of Victorian Britain

Yet portrayals like Conan Doyle's have cemented a view of opium as the drug of choice of the 19th century addict, part of the gothic image of Victorian London, along with fog-ridden streets, Jack the Ripper and, of course, Sherlock Holmes. But its influence on 19th century society went far beyond smoke-filled hovels in the backstreets of London's Limehouse. A forgotten part of Victorian Britain's past is just how widespread the use of opium was...

What is opium?

Extracted from the breadseed poppy plant (or papaver somniferum), opium is a highly addictive narcotic substance. It can be consumed in a variety of ways, either orally, through injection or by being smoked. It was the latter that was the preferred method for Chinese immigrants in Britain and those who visited London's opium dens. But just what would the smokers have experienced? According to the United States Drug Enforcement Administration, the effect of opium use is similar to that of heroin, which is also derived from papaver somniferum. "Users experience a euphoric rush," their site explains "followed by relaxation and the relief of physical pain".

Opium and Victorian society

During the 19th century the taking of opium was not illegal in Britain. According to the *Guardian*, between 10 and 20 tonnes of the narcotic was consumed by the Victorians per year. But this was not consumption purely for recreational purposes, as opiates were widely available as popular medicines. Opiates were combined with alcohol to create tinctures. The resultant mixture could be taken for a variety of ailments, including

An 1880 illustration of an opium den in London's East End

© Getty; Alamy

to provide relief from aches and pains and even to limit the effects of the dreaded hangover. One of the most popular of these was laudanum, a potent mixture of alcohol and 10 per cent opium.

But as the effects of opium were not yet fully understood, these tinctures were not limited to use purely by adults and disturbingly, they were regularly administered to infants. The drug was even nicknamed "The Poor Child's Nurse" by British satirical magazine *Punch* and was often given to young children to stop them from crying. This was in the form of medicines or cordials which contained an opium derivative such as morphine.

Britain was not alone in its opiate addiction: roughly 1 in 200 Americans in the 19th century were addicted to opiates. By the 1830s millions of Chinese civilians also found themselves addicted – partially due to the actions of British traders. Although introduced to the country a century earlier, the drug was being illegally brought into China by the East India Company who used it in order to obtain tea. By 1839 opium was paying for the British tea trade. The Chinese government was forced to take action and their subsequent destruction of opium held by British traders was a key factor in starting the first Opium War.

Hives of vice and horror

The practice of smoking opium was introduced in Britain by Chinese sailors who settled in London's East End. Smoking opium provided a much faster and more powerful response in the user than oral consumption. However this method was

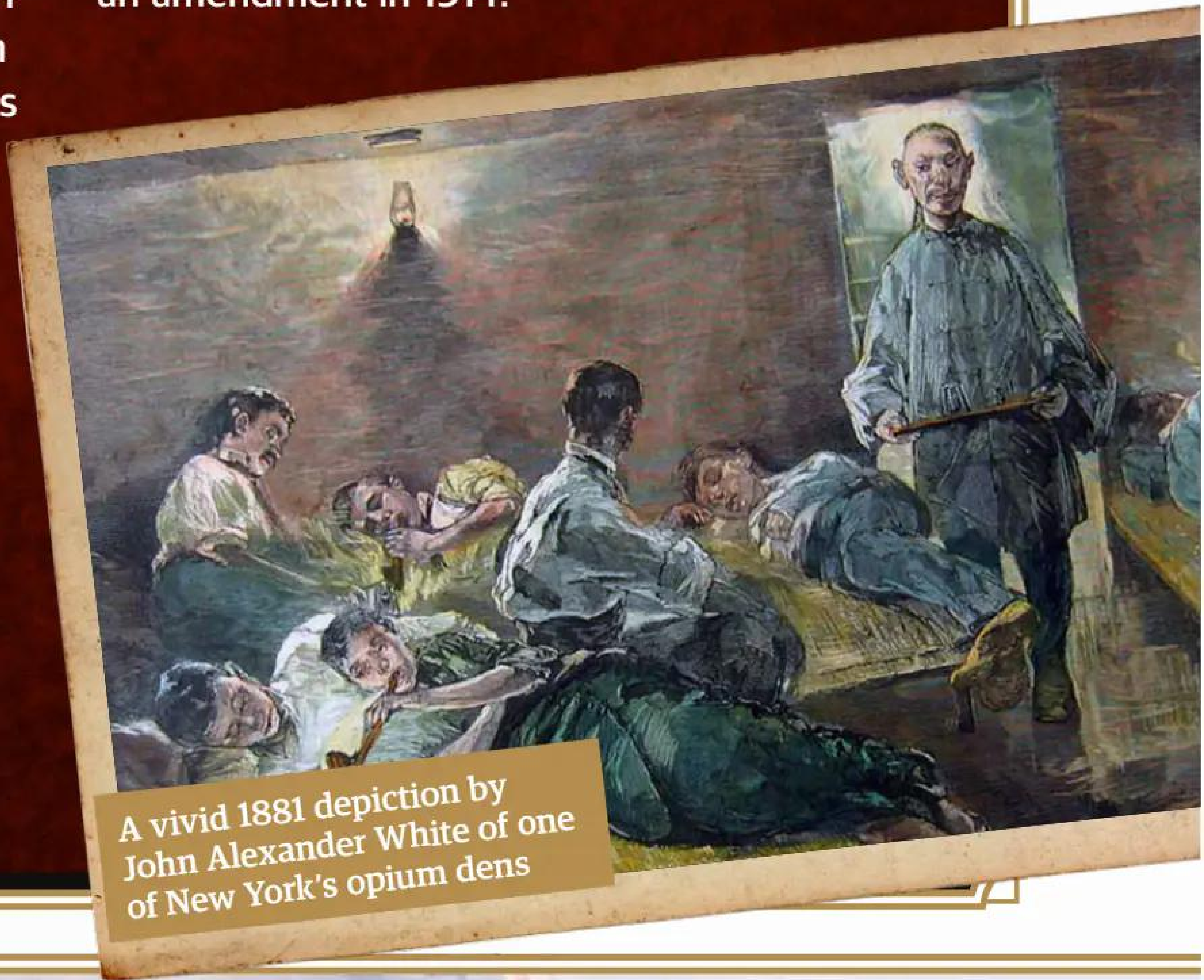
Opium in the USA

Across the Atlantic, the United States was facing an opium epidemic of its own...

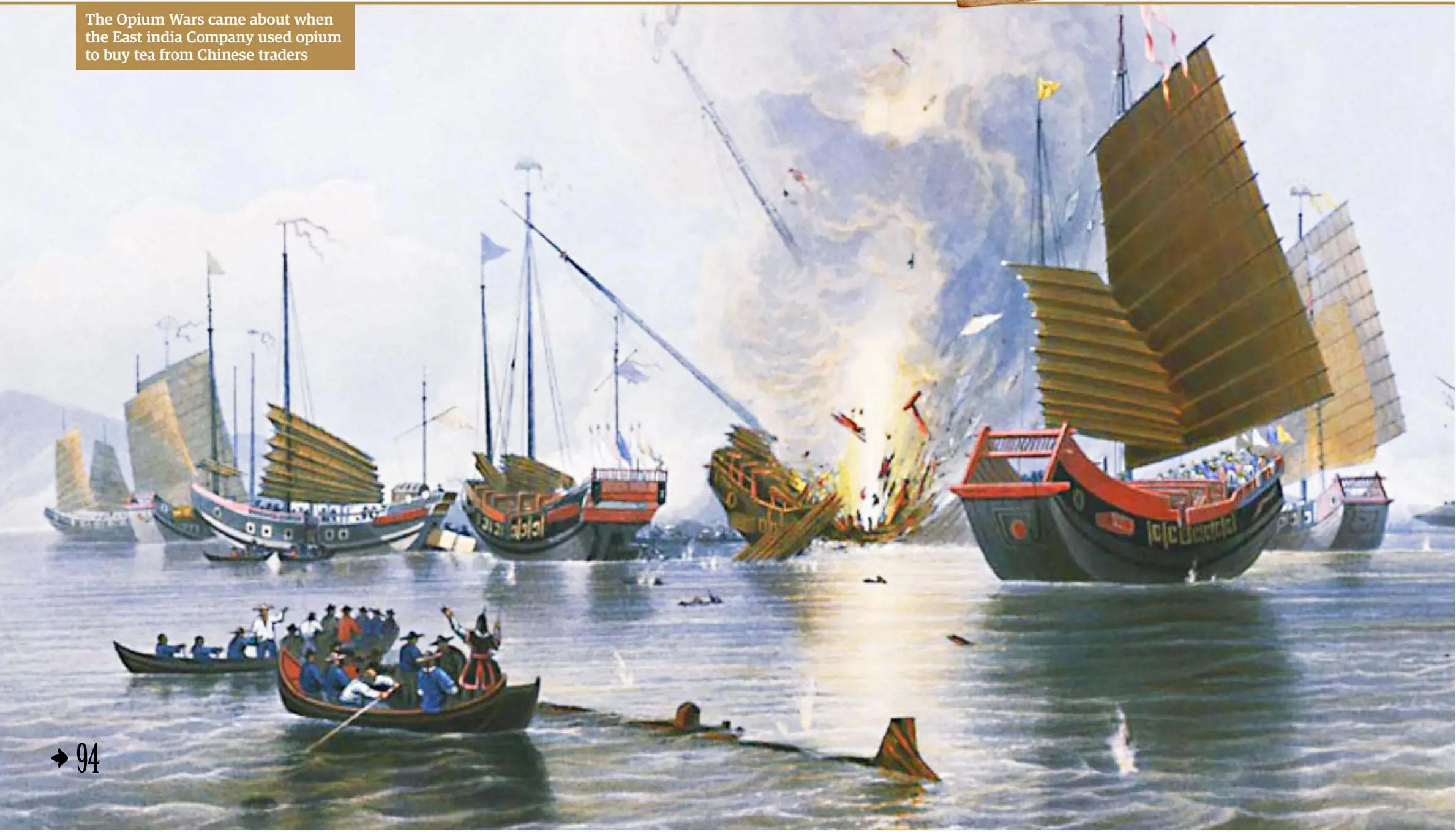
It was not just Great Britain that found itself in the grip of an opiate obsession during the 19th century. Across the pond, Americans too succumbed to both the delights and the dread of the new drug. According to the *Smithsonian Magazine*, although opium had been used earlier, widespread obsession began during the American Civil War, where many injured soldiers became addicted after taking opiates to help relieve pain. They state that the Union Army freely gave its soldiers 10 million opium pills and 2.8 million ounces of opium tinctures and powders.

By the 19th century, similar to the situation in Britain, a range of opiates were freely available to the general public. One of the most popular tinctures available was Dr McMunn's Elixir of Opium, created by the titular physician in the 1830s before being bought and widely sold a decade later. Like many British tinctures this was also advertised as being suitable for infants, though by the 1890s the medical profession became aware of the dangers of these highly addictive medicines.

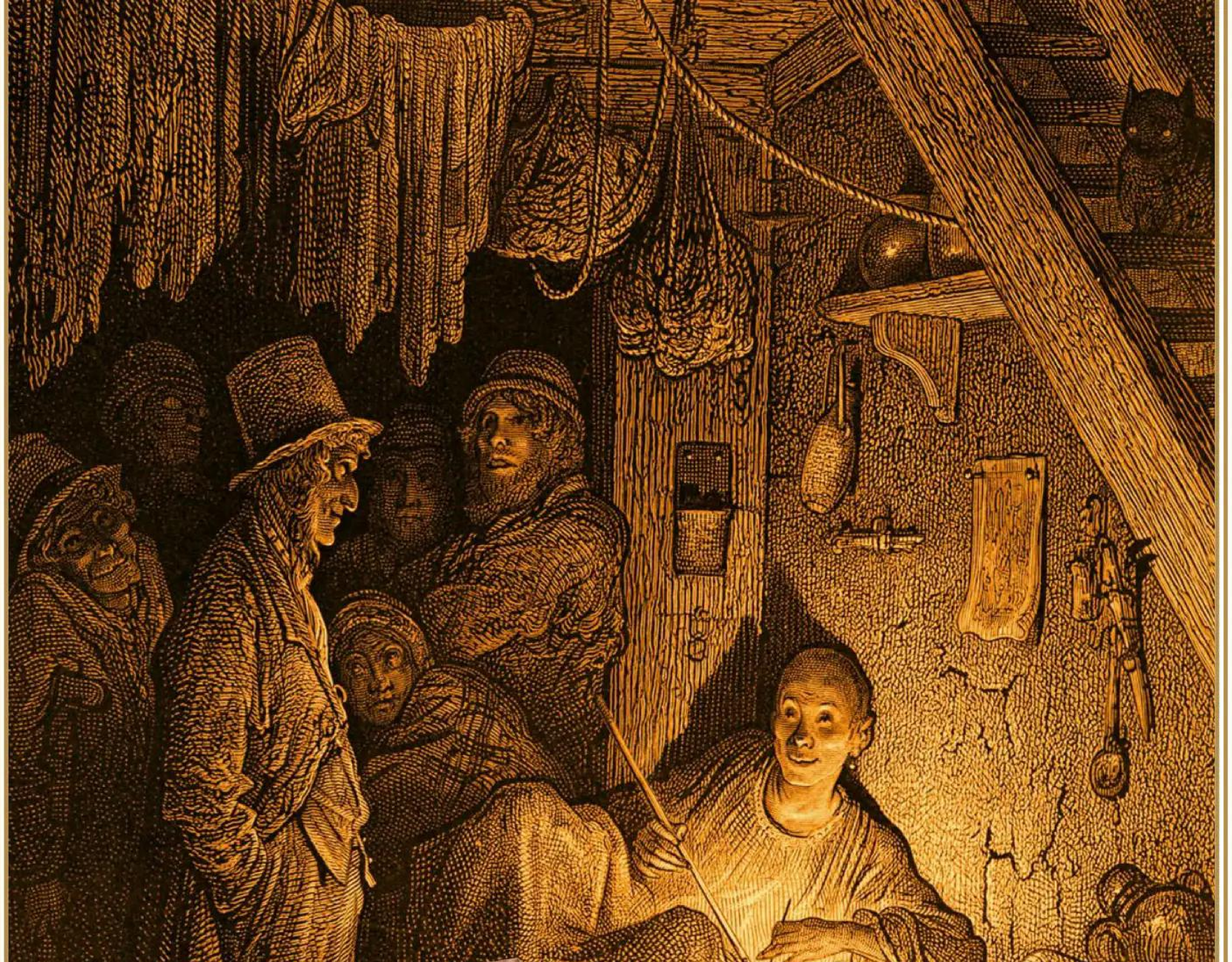
20 years prior however, Chinese immigrants to the New World had brought the practice of opium smoking with them, to a rapidly addicted population who were soon seeking other ways to obtain their high. Dens spread across major American cities and flourished until the passing of the Smoking Opium Exclusion Act in 1909 which banned the import and recreational use of the drug, followed by an amendment in 1914.



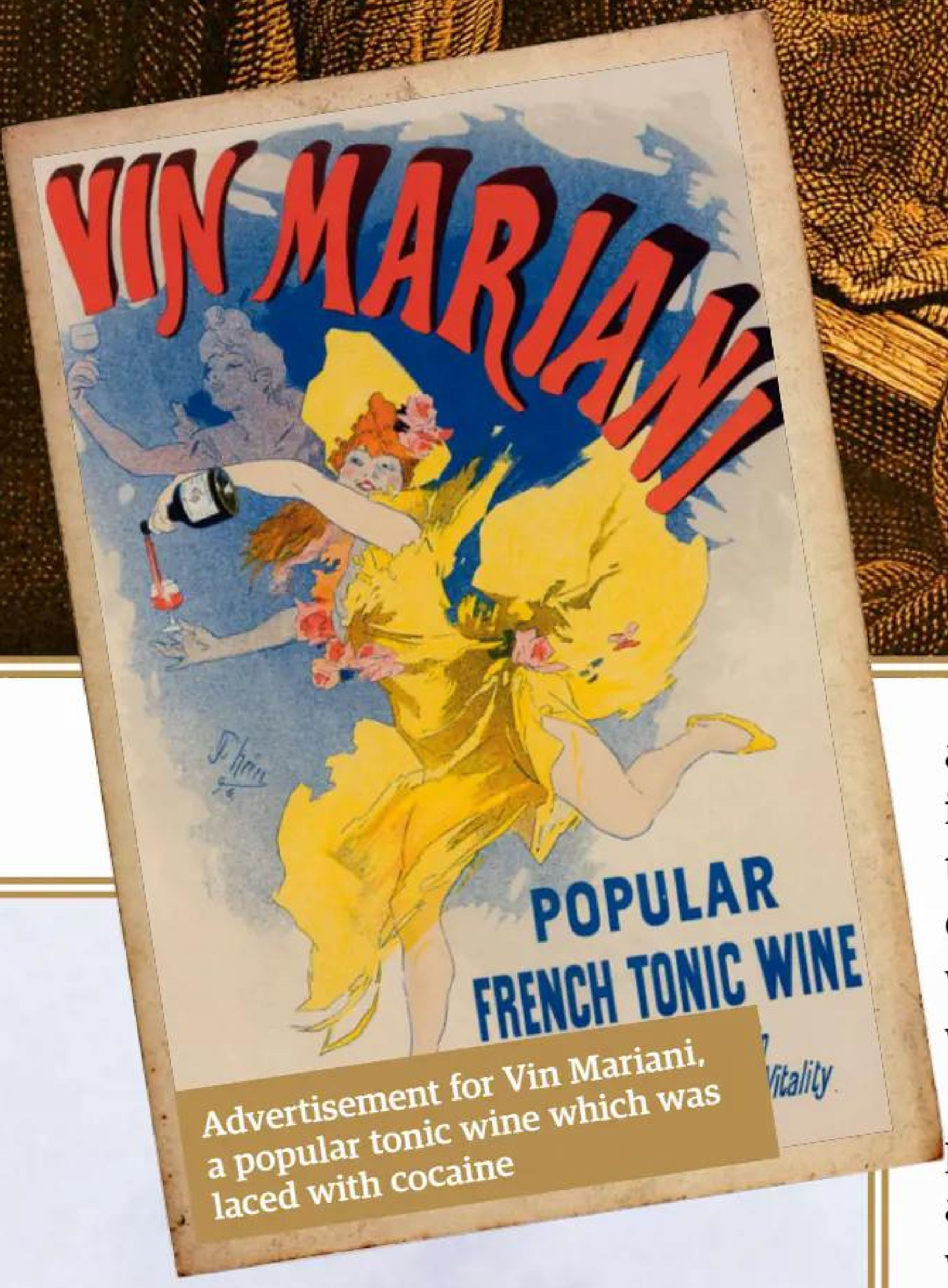
A vivid 1881 depiction by John Alexander White of one of New York's opium dens



The Opium Wars came about when the East india Company used opium to buy tea from Chinese traders



A vivid illustration of opium smoking from Charles Dickens' *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*



Advertisement for Vin Mariani, a popular tonic wine which was laced with cocaine

also more addictive. Those who were interested in the recreational smoking of opium would go to specially designated establishments known as opium dens. These establishments were not as widespread as perhaps has been exaggerated and were located primarily in London.

Here, for a small fee, an interested party could partake of the pipe in comfortable surroundings and wait for the effects to wear off. The smoker would remove his shoes and lie on his side, resting his head on a pillow. Sometimes these 'pillows' might actually be Chinese opium pillows, beautifully decorated ceramic objects specifically designed for use during opium consumption.

The 1881 work *Free Lance: Tiltings in Many Lists* by Charles James Dunphie and Albert King, includes a chapter on London's opium dens. However, rather than featuring vivid descriptions portraying hives of vice and debauchery, Dunphie claims that "I never was in better regulated houses of public entertainment". Of the occupants of the dens, Dunphie goes on to state; "in no men, of whatever social rank, have I seen a kinder deportment or more mannerly behaviour than in the opium smokers at Limehouse".

> "Other narcotic substances, including cocaine and cannabis, were also freely available"

Perhaps the most famous London opium den was the one owned by Ah Sing. Some sources state that the establishment was visited by persons from a variety of walks of life, including the upper classes. Ah Sing himself was said to have been fond of the poppy. Following the closure of his den, Ah Sing is said to have run a boarding house, but the enterprise proved far from profitable and in 1890 he died penniless.

Dreams versus reality

But why has the image of the opium den become so powerful? This is largely due to the fact that, when researching these establishments, there is difficulty in separating fact from fiction. A number of noted 19th century authors (not to mention the popular press) featured them in works that added to their reputation as dens of vice and horror. Perhaps the most famous of these is Thomas De Quincy's *Confessions of an Opium Eater*. First published in 1821, the book provided a captivated public with autobiographical accounts of De Quincy's experiences under opium's influence.

But the dens also became the subject of popular fiction. Charles Dickens' *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* features a lurid description of an opium den. When researching the novel, Dickens is said to have visited Ah Sing's in the company of two police officers. In Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the immortal protagonist begins to use the drug to suppress the memories of the sins he has committed. And, as previously mentioned, Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Man with the Twisted Lip* saw famous detective Sherlock Holmes become embroiled in a murder connected to an opium den. Indeed, it was not just opium that featured in Conan Doyle's stories. Holmes himself was portrayed as a drug user and was shown as being partial to cocaine. All of these examples and more helped solidify the opium den as a gothic trope.

Other drugs in Victorian Britain

But opium was not the only drug taken by the Victorians. Other substances, including cocaine and cannabis, were also freely available. In 1884 the ophthalmologist Karl Koller experimented with cocaine, placing a few droplets into a patient's eye. Koller was delighted when he discovered that the effect was similar to anaesthetic, numbing the feeling of pain. His discovery created a sensation in the medical world and provided an alternative to the ever-risky chloroform. The drug quickly found a multitude of uses and could be given to treat everything from seasickness to the common cold.

Yet forms of cocaine had been around prior to Koller's discovery. In 1863 the French chemist Angelo Mariani created Vin Mariani, a wine infused with coca leaves. The resultant substance was an extremely popular pick-me-up that was

© Getty; Alamy

said to have been enjoyed by everyone from Jules Verne to Pope Leo XIII and even Queen Victoria herself. The drink would go out of fashion in the early years of the 20th century as the dangerous effects of cocaine became more widely known.

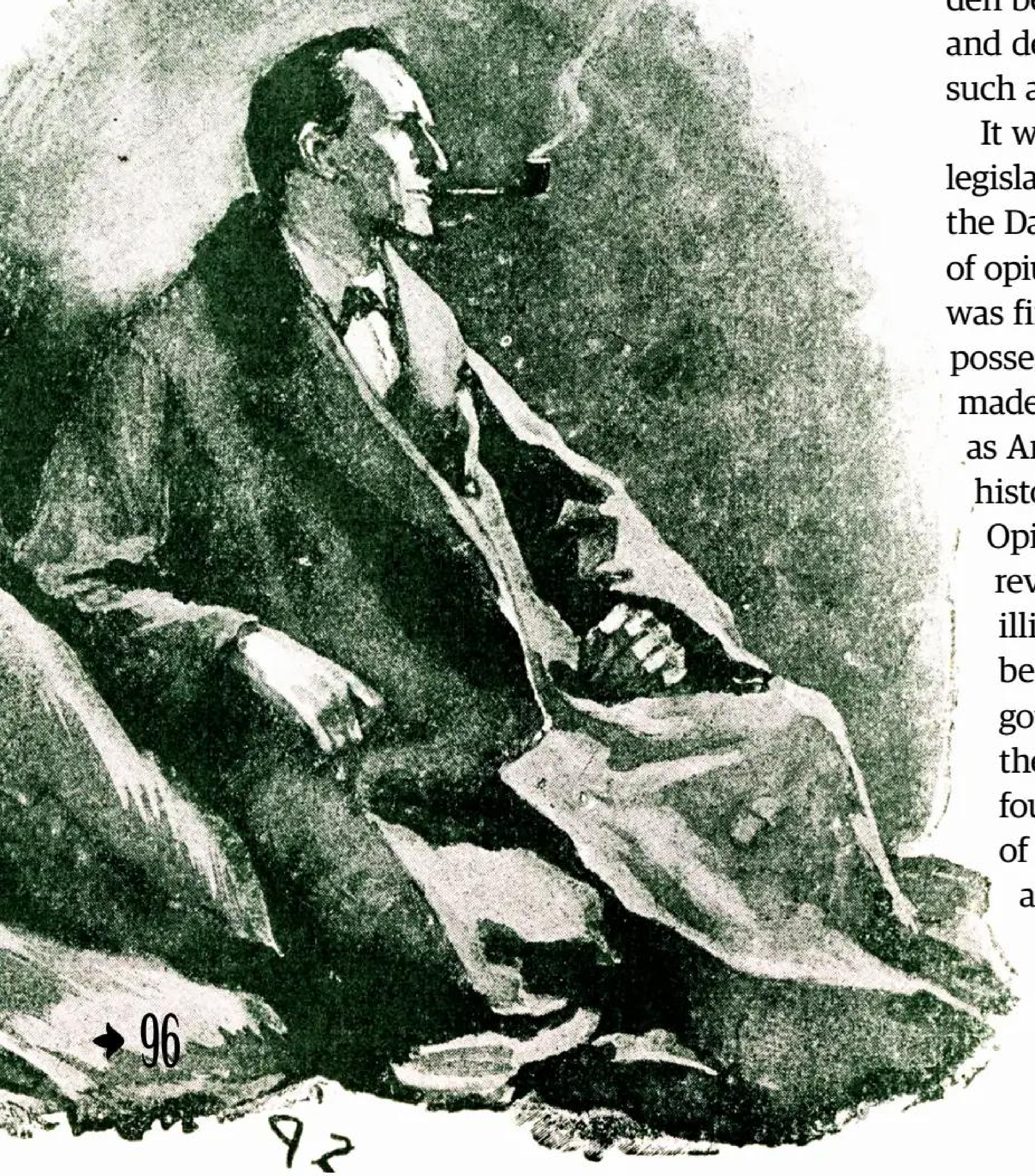
Cannabis was regularly administered to treat muscle spasms and even menstrual cramps. Although the drug has a long medicinal history, it was Dr William O'Shaughnessy who brought the substance into the Victorian age in 1842. O'Shaughnessy had served in India where he had discovered 'Indian hemp', a substance used in local medicines. O'Shaughnessy experimented with the drug, testing it on animals and even children.

O'Shaughnessy soon realised he had discovered an effective painkiller that, similarly to opium, could be mixed with alcohol and administered orally. The negative effects of the drug were dismissed by O'Shaughnessy who stated; "As to the evil sequelae so unanimously dwelt on by all writers, these did not appear to me so numerous, so immediate, or so formidable, as many which may be clearly traced to over-indulgence in other powerful stimulants or narcotics, viz. alcohol, opium, or tobacco."

Drug addicts in Victorian society

But if the use of opium and other substances was so widespread, how did society change and eventually come to view their users as addicts? According to Virginia Berridge in her 1978 paper 'Victorian Opium Eating; Responses to Opiate Use in 19th Century England', the eventual change came about due to a potent mixture of "Class tensions, the process of professionalism, and its underlying self-interest, morality, and racial hostility as well as changes in medical practice". Drug use soon became a key signifier of a lack of social class.

Arthur Conan Doyle's heroic detective Sherlock Holmes was portrayed as a drug user



> "The image of the opium den became associated with foreign decadence and debauchery"

In 1868, the Pharmacy Act was passed which restricted who could sell and purchase substances. Included in this act was opium, which was now restricted to pharmacies. But the various tinctures that included opium were still widely available and would remain so until 1920's Dangerous Drugs Act.

It was during the late 19th century, as opinion on the drugs themselves shifted and changed, that perceptions towards addicts were first formulated. The historian Louise Foxcroft, in her paper 'The Making of Addiction: The "Use and Abuse" of Opium in Nineteenth-Century Britain', claims that doctors such as Francis E Anstie and George Beard viewed addiction as being the result of the users' "debased moral nature", rather than the addictive properties of the drugs themselves. Drug addicts in Victorian Britain were given such brutal treatments as "scalding baths, mud plasters and physical force".

The end of oblivion?

The end of the Victorian period did not spell the end of Britain's opium addiction and the early years of the 20th century saw use of the narcotic continue unabated. By this stage, despite the fact that Transform (the Drug Policy Foundation) states that more opium was being smuggled from the UK to China than vice versa, opium abuse had become associated with racist views towards Chinese populations in Britain. The image of the opium den became associated with foreign decadence and debauchery, appearing in racist pulp literature such as Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu novels.

It was not until the introduction of emergency legislation during the First World War and finally the Dangerous Drugs Act of 1920 that the use of opium (as well as other narcotic substances) was finally curtailed. The import, export and possession of opium, cocaine and heroin was made illegal. However first hand accounts (such as Annie Lai and Bob and Pippa Little's 1986 oral history piece 'Chinatown Annie: The East End Opium Trade 1920-35') revealed that the opium trade continued illicitly for some time. Now, opium dens have become part of the popular image of Victorian gothic. Bars and restaurants themed around these once secretive establishments can be found around the world, while the true extent of Britain's opiate addiction remains hidden and forgotten. Yet another skeleton in the closet of our Victorian past.

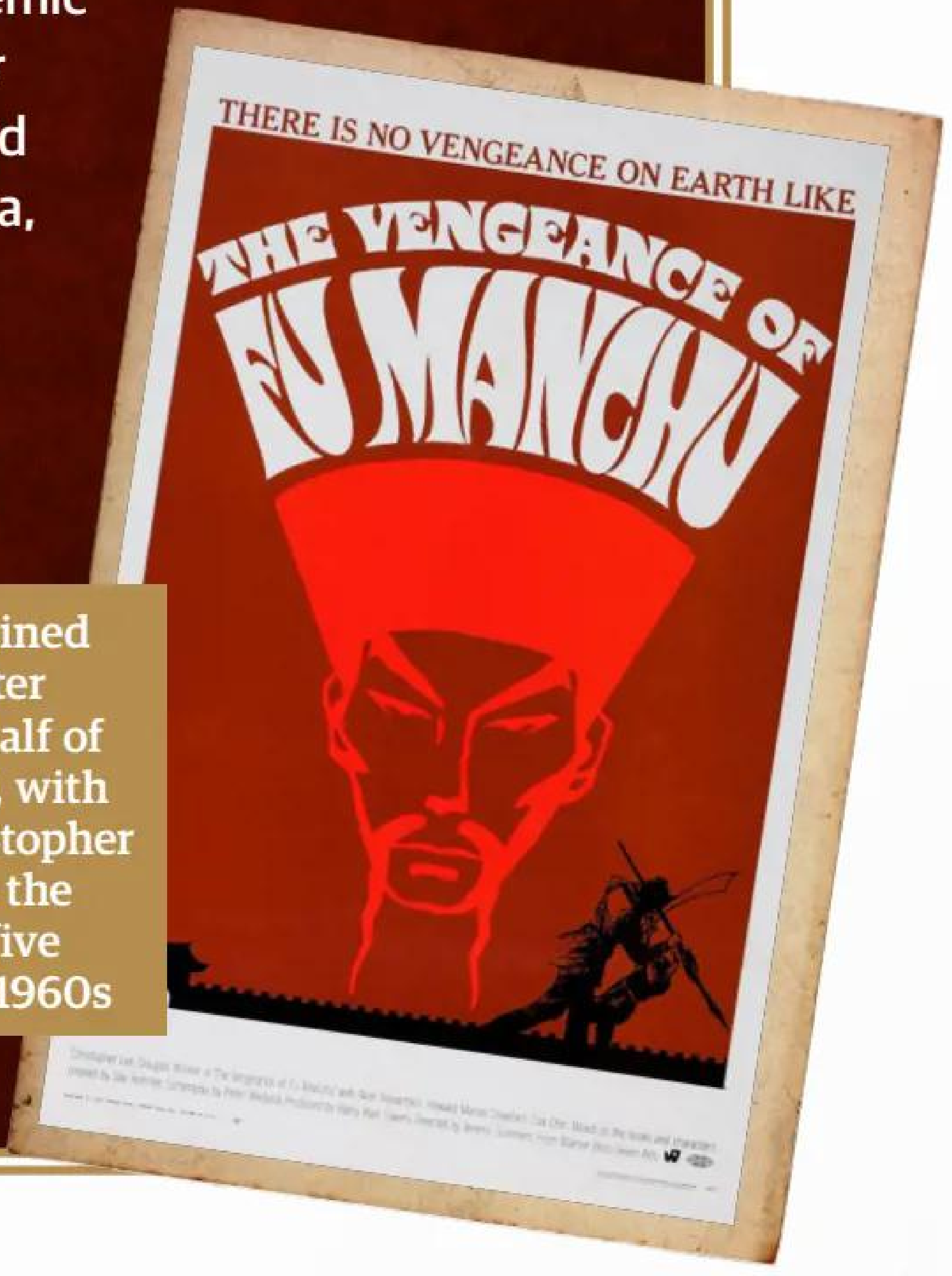
The 'Yellow Peril'

A wave of racial hatred targeted London's Chinese community, and the opium dens associated with them

In 1895, following the Japanese victory over China in the First Sino-Japanese war, the German emperor Kaiser Wilhelm II commissioned a drawing which depicted European nations at war with those of the East. Soon, Chinese immigrants in Britain became the subject of intense racial prejudice. A 1911 article distributed by the Home Office, distressingly titled 'The Chinese in England: A Growing National Problem', warned the populace of "a vast and convulsive Armageddon to determine who is to be the master of the world, the white or yellow man".

Author Sax Rohmer sought to capitalise on the burgeoning villainisation of Chinese persons after his ouija board informed him that a Chinaman would be the source of his fortune. To this end he created the character of Dr Fu Manchu in a series of novels and stories beginning in 1912. Fu Manchu, a criminal mastermind, would continue to feature in novels by Rohmer until his death in 1959 and would also be the subject of films, serials and radio plays.

Rohmer's pulp fiction, as well as other media portrayals, quickly ensured the vice of opium dens was associated purely with Chinese immigrants – despite the fact that the majority of Britain's opium was imported from Turkey. According to Virginia Berridge in her 1978 article 'Victorian Opium Eating', "Hostility towards this small group of culturally and socially dissident foreigners helped emphasise the deviant nature of opium use". Unfounded fears that these immigrants could create an opium use epidemic in Britain, similar to that which had occurred in China, fuelled a racist and inaccurate narrative about Chinese people.


THERE IS NO VENGEANCE ON EARTH LIKE
THE VENGEANCE OF
FU MANCHU

Fu Manchu remained a popular character during the first half of the 20th century, with noted actor Christopher Lee appearing as the titular villain in five films during the 1960s

VICTOR PROUT

A 1902 illustration of a Chinese opium den in London. Opium dens continued after the death of Queen Victoria and became associated with the so-called 'Yellow Peril'

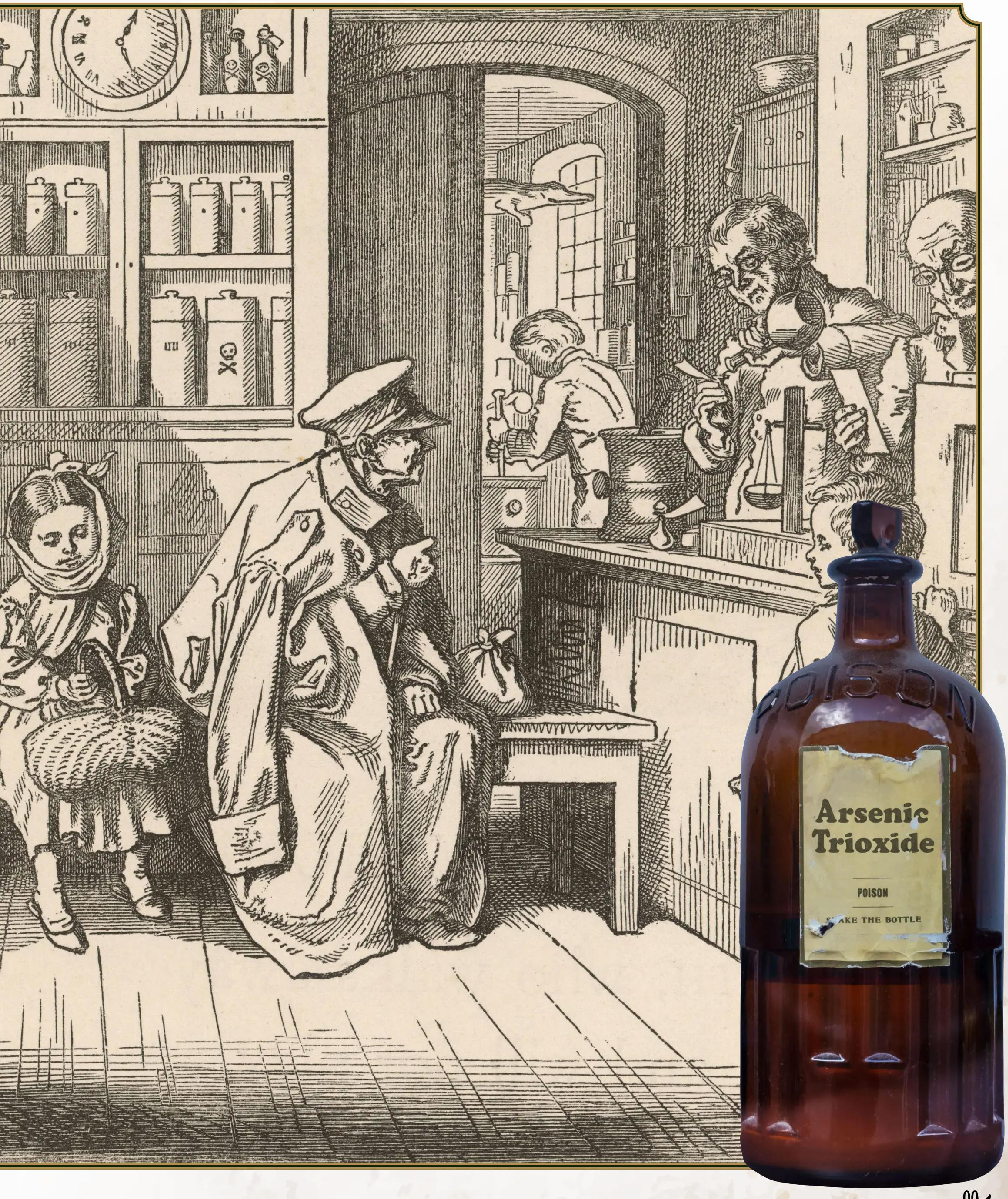
© Getty, Alamy

The Golden Age of Poisoning

The technical advances in Victorian chemistry meant that would-be murderers soon had a new and deadly array of easy-to-use weapons at their disposal

Written by April Madden

© Getty; Alamy


POISON
Arsenic Trioxide
POISON
SHAKE THE BOTTLE

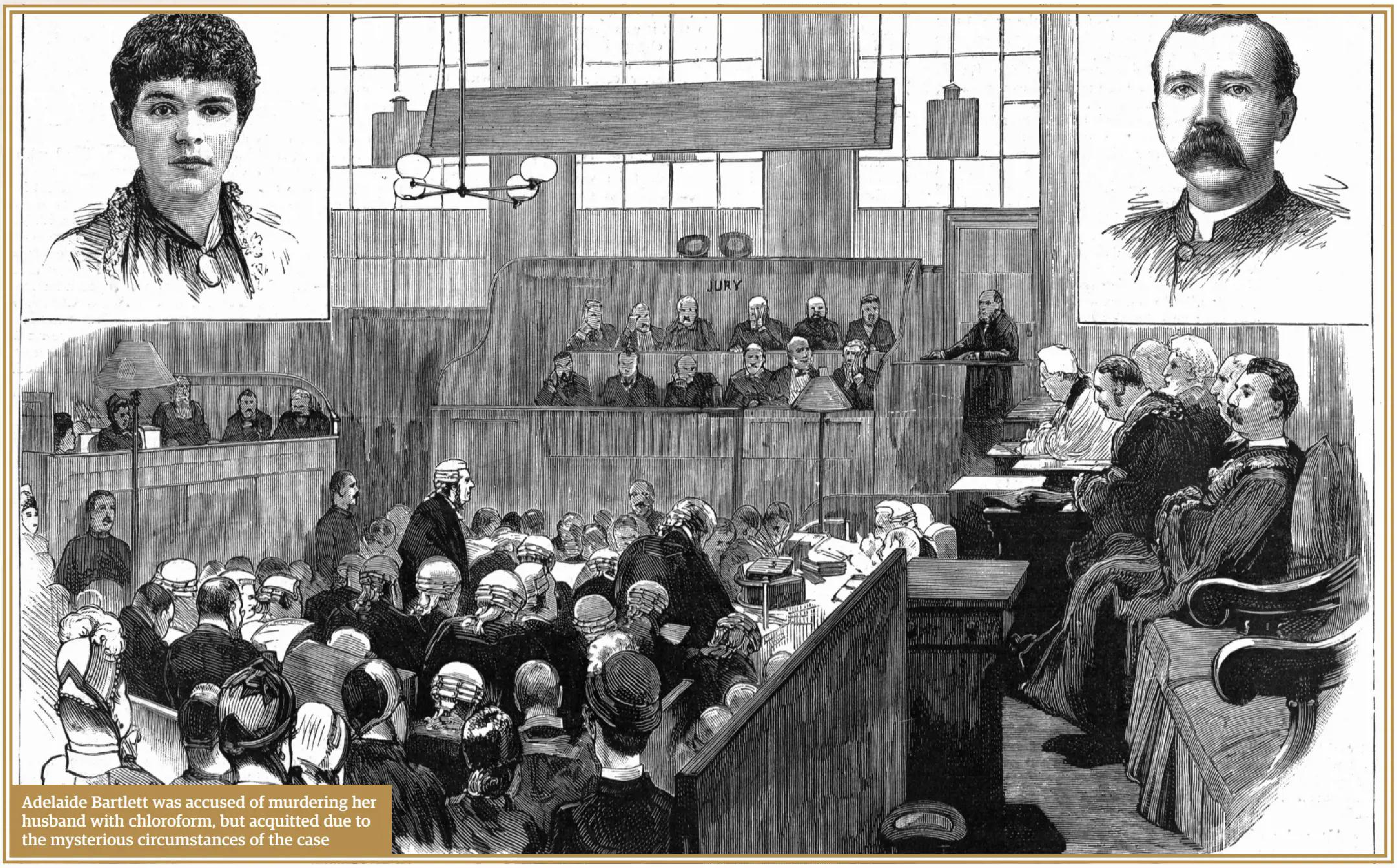
When we think of Victorian technology we often think of the marvels of engineering conjured by the men of science who literally built the Empire, but the feats performed by Victorian chemists were equal to those shaped in iron and stone by their flashier counterparts. Prior to the Victorian era, chemistry still had the whizz-bang mad-scientist reputation that came with its roots in the ancient and occasionally magical art of alchemy, and it was the likes of 18th century scientists Isaac Newton and Antoine Lavoisier who were responsible for transforming the discipline's reputation for charlatanism into a serious industrial science. In Victorian times, chemistry as we know it today was still very much in its Wild West era – unprecedented, unregulated, and unpredictable – with the result that many newly crafted substances packed a little more punch than their formulators may have originally intended. The colourful new world of Victorian chemistry, of mauve gowns and yellow wallpaper and glassware that glowed a bit too green, was in fact dripping with poison.

Some of this was intentional. Victorian civil engineers were well on the way to sewer systems that would transform cities right down to the slums, but it wasn't just wastewater that found its way into the labyrinths of filth beneath the streets. Properly organised civic refuse collection and disposal was in its infancy, roads were still filled with dung from the horses that pulled Victorian carriages, and the stables that housed them were a breeding ground for more than just thoroughbreds. Victorian Britain had a pest problem, and chemists had the solution. Several solutions, in fact: arsenic, strychnine and cyanide were some of the most popular chemicals used to dispense with rats, mice, and insects.

Medical chemistry, meanwhile, wasn't quite as efficacious as the modern pharmacology of today, nor was disease as well understood. In a world where the most effective medicines were potent concoctions of exotic narcotics, strong alcohol and arsenic, the best solution for minimising household illness was thought to be spotless hygiene, achieved with toxic substances including carbolic soap, lye and black lead. The Victorian maxim that cleanliness was next to godliness might indeed take some overenthusiastic scrubbers into the hereafter. That's assuming you got as far as the washing up – the newly developed Victorian methods for industrial food production saw unscrupulous manufacturers add clay, copper sulphate and alum to bread to bulk it out and make it whiter. Commercially produced sweets were riddled with mercury and copper, and in one famous case in Bradford, UK, in 1858, 20 people died after eating candy that had accidentally been laced with arsenic instead of the usual plaster of Paris that was used to thicken the formula. A year later, six schoolboys and a pub landlord all fell ill after eating buns purchased from a Bristol baker named Farr. It turned out that while he usually coloured his wares with chromate of lead, this batch had accidentally been baked with sulphide of arsenic instead due to a mistake made by the pharmacist who supplied him with chemicals. The landlord, Robert May, tried to take the baker to court, but was told by local magistrates that, as nobody had died as a result of the accident, there would be no case to answer.

> "It took a lot for a poisoner to be spotted, a fact that emboldened a number of notorious murderers"

This heady combination of new, cheap, deadly substances with lax legal oversight, plus the useful fact that most commercially produced foods, medicines and cleaning substances already contained toxic ingredients, made Victorian Britain



Adelaide Bartlett was accused of murdering her husband with chloroform, but acquitted due to the mysterious circumstances of the case

© Getty; Alamy

The notorious Dr Crippen

Discover how the homicidal homeopath poisoned his wife before attempting to flee with his mistress

Hawley Harvey Crippen was an American homeopath who moved to Britain with his wife Cora in 1897. He found a job as a manager at the Drouet Institute for the Deaf, where he began an affair with a typist named Ethel Le Neve. Meanwhile, his wife Cora was performing as a music hall artist – until she mysteriously disappeared in January 1910. Her famous friends agitated police to investigate, and eventually they found a human torso in the cellar of Crippen's home, which they identified as Cora's due to a distinctive scar. The torso was found to contain significant amounts of scopolamine. At the time this drug was frequently combined with morphine as an anaesthetic for surgery, but at high concentrations it could be fatal.

Crippen and his lover fled to Canada, where they were arrested on board the ship Montrose after its captain telegrammed authorities after suspecting the two were the fugitives he'd heard about in the news. Chief Inspector Walter Dew took a faster ship to catch up with the pair and, disguised as a pilot, came aboard the Montrose. On being introduced to the fleeing poisoner, he famously said, "Good morning, Dr Crippen. Do you know me?" Crippen responded: "Thank God it's over," and allowed himself to be cuffed. He was executed for Cora's murder in November 1910 after a high-profile trial.

Dr Crippen and his lover Ethel Le Neve on trial in London in 1910

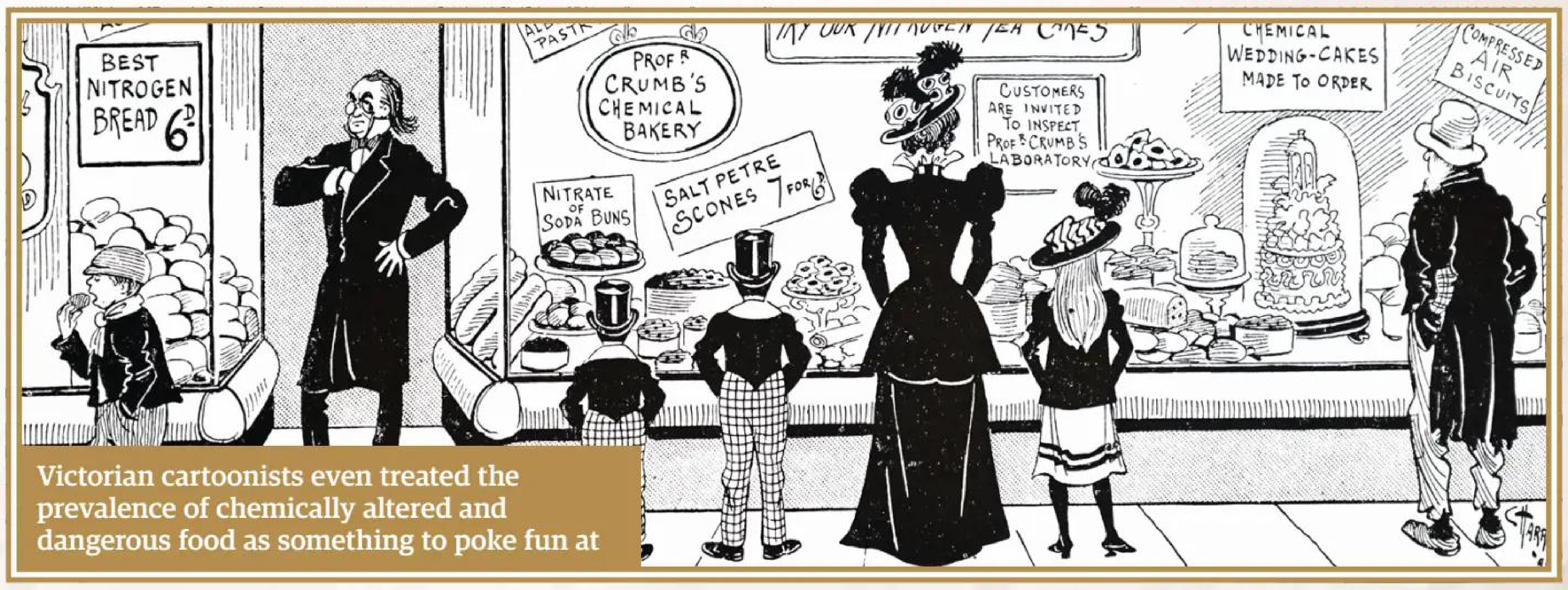
Christiana Edmunds used sweet treats as a vehicle for strychnine, once sending herself a parcel of her deadly laced cakes to allay suspicion

a poisoner's playground. Historically, poisoning has always been a female-dominated crime, traditionally a way for otherwise powerless women to dispense with domestic abusers, or for gold-digging seductresses to help themselves to wealthy inheritances. Before the Victorian era, carefully brewed concoctions of herbs and poisonous plants were the weapon of choice for such femmes fatales – deadly nightshade is named belladonna, or 'beautiful lady', after the Italian Renaissance women of substance(s) who hid it among their cosmetics and used it to slowly dispose of their husbands. With the advent of commercially available chemicals though, poisoners had a quick, easy and, at the time, largely undetectable cause of death at their disposal. Arsenic poisoning causes vomiting and diarrhoea, symptoms also caused by adulterated food, Victorian medicines, and by the cholera epidemics that plagued the nation. It would take a particularly enthusiastic coroner to start asking the questions that might allow them to spot foul play, assuming a death even registered on their radar. And to get hold of these new and deadly substances you didn't have to be an amateur herbalist or a suspiciously dab hand in the stillroom, you could simply pop to the shops and pick up anything from rat poison to cough syrup to face cream, no questions asked.

It took a lot for a poisoner to be spotted, a fact that emboldened one notorious murderer. Mary Ann Cotton, née Robson and known as The Black Widow, was finally caught and executed for the murder of her stepson in 1873, but she is thought to have been a serial killer who used arsenic to dispense with three of her four husbands, a lover, her own mother, her best friend, and at least 11 children during a lengthy killing spree that began in the early 1860s. Many of her victims had life insurance that paid out to Mary Ann on their death; her third husband even suspected her crimes due to her constantly nagging him to take out a policy.

By 1872 Mary Ann was in full angel-of-death mode, having just disposed of husband number four, Frederick Cotton, and working regularly as a nurse. A parish official, the local assistant coroner, Thomas Riley, tried to engage her on a well-paid contract to look after a smallpox patient, but Mary Ann complained that she couldn't because the last of her most recent clutch of stepchildren, Frederick's son Charles Edward, required her care. She asked Riley to commit the child to the workhouse; Riley refused. She then told him the boy was sick, adding, "I won't be troubled long; he'll go like all the rest". The boy died five days later.

Riley was suspicious, and, in his role as assistant coroner, persuaded the local police and doctor, William Byers Kilburn, to delay certifying the boy's death so that it could be investigated. Charles was insured, but a payout could not be made to Mary Ann until a death certificate was provided, something she was seen to complain about at the local insurance office. Riley managed to have an inquest held into the child's death, but the jury returned a verdict of natural causes, seeing Mary Ann as a poor, put-upon widow with a tragic


BEST NITROGEN BREAD 6D
PROFR CRUMB'S CHEMICAL BAKERY
NITRATE OF SODA BUNS
SALT PETRE SCONES 7 FOR 6D
CUSTOMERS ARE INVITED TO INSPECT PROFR CRUMB'S LABORATORY
CHEMICAL WEDDING-CAKES MADE TO ORDER
COMPRESSED AIR BISCUITS
Victorian cartoonists even treated the prevalence of chemically altered and dangerous food as something to poke fun at

Arsenic in the air

How the Victorian love of wallpaper led to sickness, fainting, hallucinations and even death

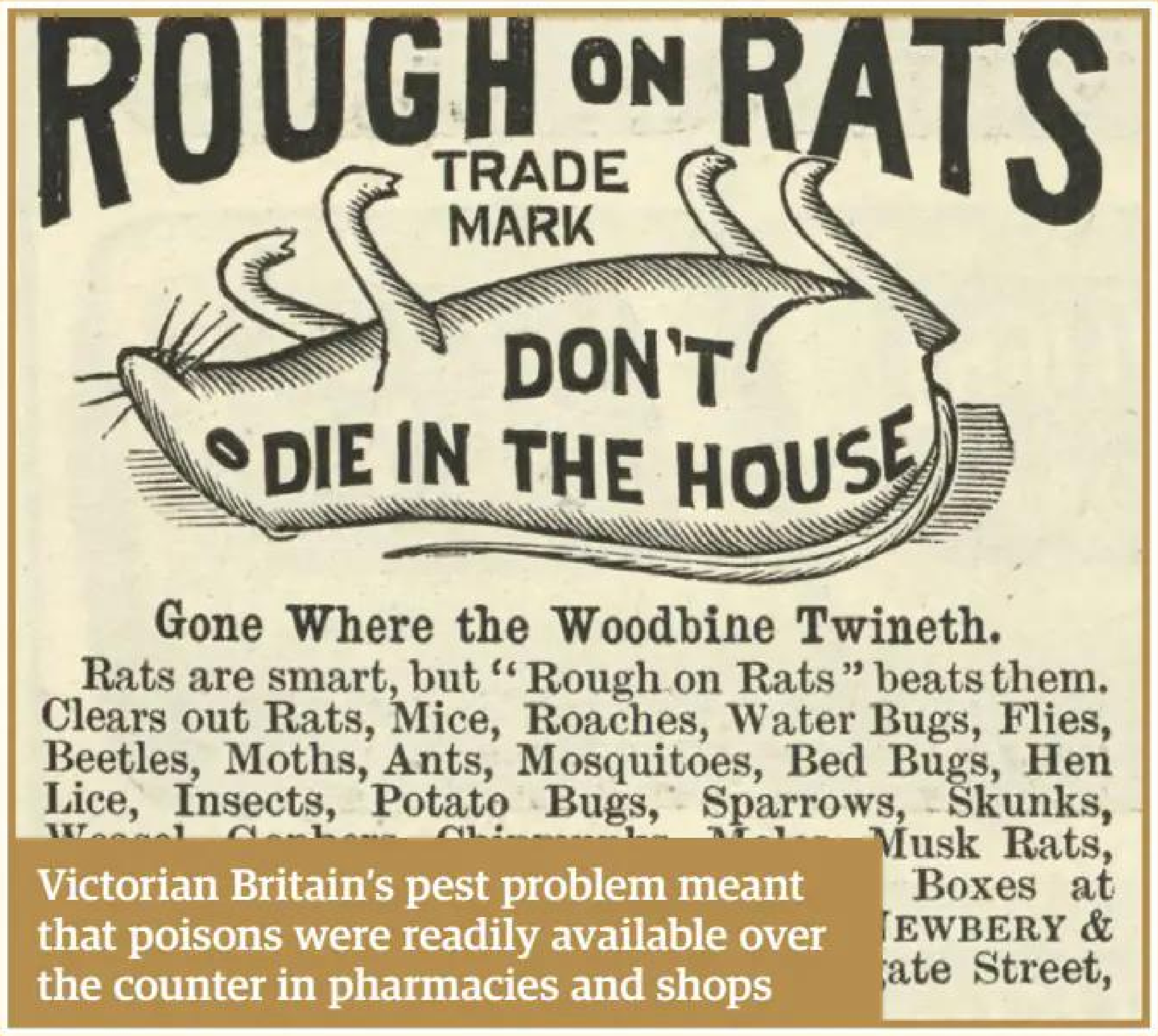
Victorian tastes ran to the ostentatious, and one of the most popular items of home decor was wallpaper. A popular hue was Scheele's Green, a rich, earthy yellow-green pigment also found in childrens' toys, artificial flowers and sweets. Designed to breathe an aura of verdant tranquillity into the Victorian parlour, what it actually wafted into the air was arsenic.

Famously fictionalised in Charlotte Perkins' 1892 short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the deadly decor caused sickness, fainting, hallucinations, cancers and even death. It's theorised that the symptoms contributed to 'Haunted House Syndrome', in which supernatural experiences can be explained as hallucinations caused by environmental chemical poisoning. Certainly supernatural belief and claims of hauntings were high at the time. It's even been theorised that the death of Napoleon Bonaparte, from stomach cancer, was contributed to in part by the walls of his exile home on the island of St Helena – he'd had them painted green, his favourite colour.

William Morris, the leading designer of Victorian wallpaper, didn't believe that arsenic was toxic; he accused doctors who campaigned against its use of being "bitten by witch-fever". Nonetheless, by the end of the 19th century, wallpaper manufacturers began phasing the toxic chemical out of their wares.

The walls of Victorian homes could hide a deadly decorative secret. Poisoners even used it to try and get away with murder

© Getty; Alamy



ROUGH ON RATS
TRADE MARK
DON'T DIE IN THE HOUSE

Gone Where the Woodbine Twineth.

Rats are smart, but "Rough on Rats" beats them. Clears out Rats, Mice, Roaches, Water Bugs, Flies, Beetles, Moths, Ants, Mosquitoes, Bed Bugs, Hen Lice, Insects, Potato Bugs, Sparrows, Skunks,
Musk Rats,
Boxes at
EWBERY &
ate Street,

Victorian Britain's pest problem meant that poisons were readily available over the counter in pharmacies and shops

family life – after all, the loss of multiple husbands and children was by no means unusual for Victorian women of her class. Mary Ann claimed in court that Riley was trying to besmirch her reputation because she had rejected his romantic advances, and walked free, insurance payment in hand.

Nonetheless, suspicions remained, and when the newspapers finally got hold of Mary Ann's story, their lurid coverage was enough to prompt a police investigation, including some primitive Victorian forensics. The suspicious Doctor Kilburn had retained samples from attending the death of Charles Edward Cotton, and when these were found to contain arsenic the child's body was exhumed from its grave and Mary Ann's dastardly deeds were finally revealed.

Mary Ann's defence lawyer, Thomas Campbell Foster, argued persuasively that the presence of arsenic in Charles Edward Cotton's body was due to the green wallpaper in the Cottons' home – a common occurrence in the era, and now thought to be one of the explanations behind the prevalence of supernatural belief in Victorian times. The jury were unconvinced however, and in March 1873 Mary Ann Cotton was executed for her crimes.

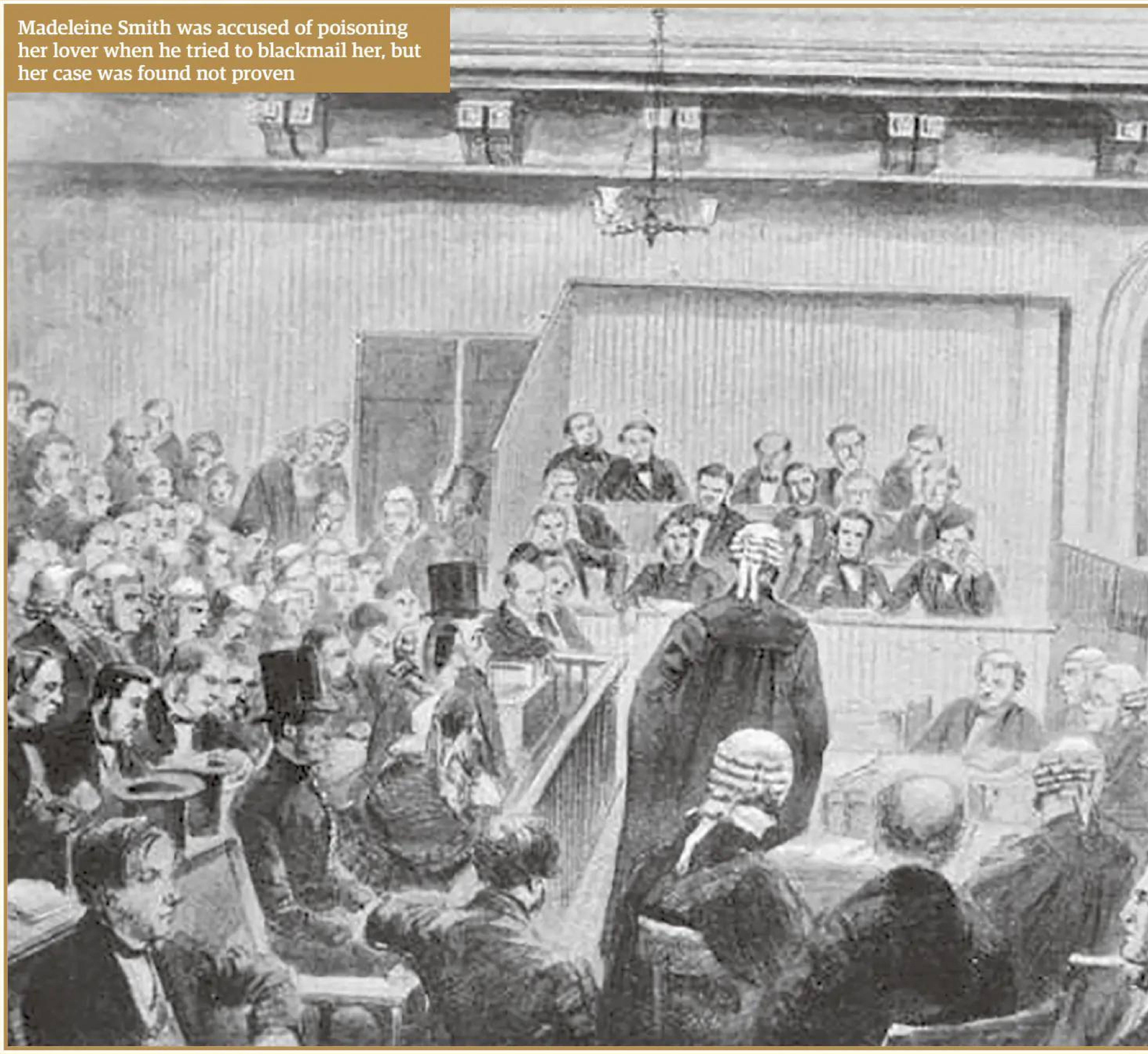
Arsenic wasn't the only weapon of choice for the Victorian mistress of poisons. Christiana Edmunds, known as the Chocolate Cream Killer, had a nasty habit of lacing confectionary with strychnine. Her primary target was the wife of the local doctor – Edmunds had an obsessive crush on Dr Charles Beard – but to cover her tracks she sent parcels of her poisoned sweets to acquaintances and even had them sold in the local sweet shop. She was caught in 1871 when a four-year-old boy died from eating one of her strychnine sweeties. Condemned to death, her sentence was commuted to life imprisonment when she was certified insane.

The Pimlico Poisoning Mystery of 1886 revolved around chloroform. Adelaide Blanche de la Tremoille was a young woman with a mysterious and aristocratic background who was married to a rich grocer named Thomas Edwin Bartlett. Mr Bartlett suffered from a range of painful ailments and the two had a decidedly odd relationship, complicated by the presence of a minister named Reverend George Dyson, who was a close friend of the couple and believed to be Adelaide's lover. Dyson was the executor of Mr Bartlett's will, which stipulated that Adelaide would inherit his wealth, on the condition that she never remarried.

In late 1885 a doctor prescribed chloroform to treat one of Mr Bartlett's illnesses. The doctor later claimed that he hadn't wanted to prescribe the drug, but his patient insisted. Adelaide sent George Dyson out to purchase her husband's medication. By this point Victorian society had become aware that the toxic substances that were so easily procured by the general public were being regularly used in poisoning cases and the Poisons Register had been set up; anyone purchasing a murderously large quantity of these chemicals had to sign, detailing when, where, and for what purpose they had purchased a poison. Smaller quantities could still be purchased without signing, however, and George Dyson visited four separate chemists in order to do this, in each claiming that he needed the substance to remove grease stains.

> "Arsenic wasn't the only weapon of choice for the Victorian mistress of poisons"

A Victorian chemist's shop, like this one recreated at Blists Hill Victorian Town Museum, provided everything a would-be poisoner could need



Madeleine Smith was accused of poisoning her lover when he tried to blackmail her, but her case was found not proven

Mary Ann Cotton used arsenic in a campaign of serial killing that saw her murder as many as 21 victims, including her own children

At 4am on 1 January 1886, Adelaide Bartlett summoned her maid and asked her to fetch the doctor. Mr Bartlett was dead in bed beside her. An autopsy revealed that his stomach was filled with liquid chloroform. However, his mouth and throat showed no signs of the chemical burns that would typically be expected in a chloroform-based murder. Mr Bartlett could have deliberately drunk the liquid chloroform, which then didn't damage his mouth or throat because he swallowed it so quickly. His death could have been suicide. The dead man's father (who had always hated his son's half-French, mixed race young wife), pressed for an investigation, and Adelaide was eventually tried for murder. The mystery surrounding her husband's lack of injury, however, meant that she was found not guilty as there was no proof that she had committed the crime. The famous Victorian surgeon and pathologist Sir James Paget remarked that, "Now that she has been acquitted for murder and cannot be tried again, she should tell us in the interest of science how she did it!"

Adelaide Bartlett wasn't the only Victorian woman who possibly got away with murder. In 1897, a 21-year-old Scottish socialite, Madeleine Smith, was engaged in a passionate affair with a packing clerk called Pierre Emile L'Angelier. When Madeleine's father arranged a marriage for her to a much wealthier man, L'Angelier tried to blackmail her, threatening to show the love letters she had written him to Madeleine's new fiancé.

Madeleine's letters were revealed in the end anyway, as L'Angelier died from arsenic poisoning and she was accused of his murder. She was found not guilty however, because although she had been recorded buying arsenic in the weeks before L'Angelier's death, the two chemists from whom she bought it testified in court that they both coloured their arsenic powder so that it was easily identifiable. The arsenic found in L'Angelier's stomach was undyed.

Eventually, Victorian industrial chemistry moved on from the toxic substances it had previously favoured, as new and safer formulas were created for dyes, flavourings, cleaning products and more. The feverish press coverage that began to surround mysterious deaths meant that this previously hidden crime attracted much more attention, and tighter controls on the Poisons Register, advances in forensic science, and the use of identifying dyes on deadly chemicals made it harder for murderers to conceal their dark deeds. By the end of the 19th century, the golden age of poisonings was largely at an end.

The Victorian cult of death

From superstitions to strange rituals, lift the veil on the fascinating and macabre ways the Victorians dealt with mortality

From taking photographs of dead relatives to opening shops selling mourning clothes, the Victorians commercialised death. This was an era of industry, with hard work being seen as the creator of fortunes. By the end of the century, there would be compulsory schooling in Britain, better literacy levels, and scientific and medical progress across the Western world. Yet at the same time, the gap between rich and poor was enormous, and poverty levels, economic depression and high mortality rates meant that many were acutely aware of the inevitability of death.

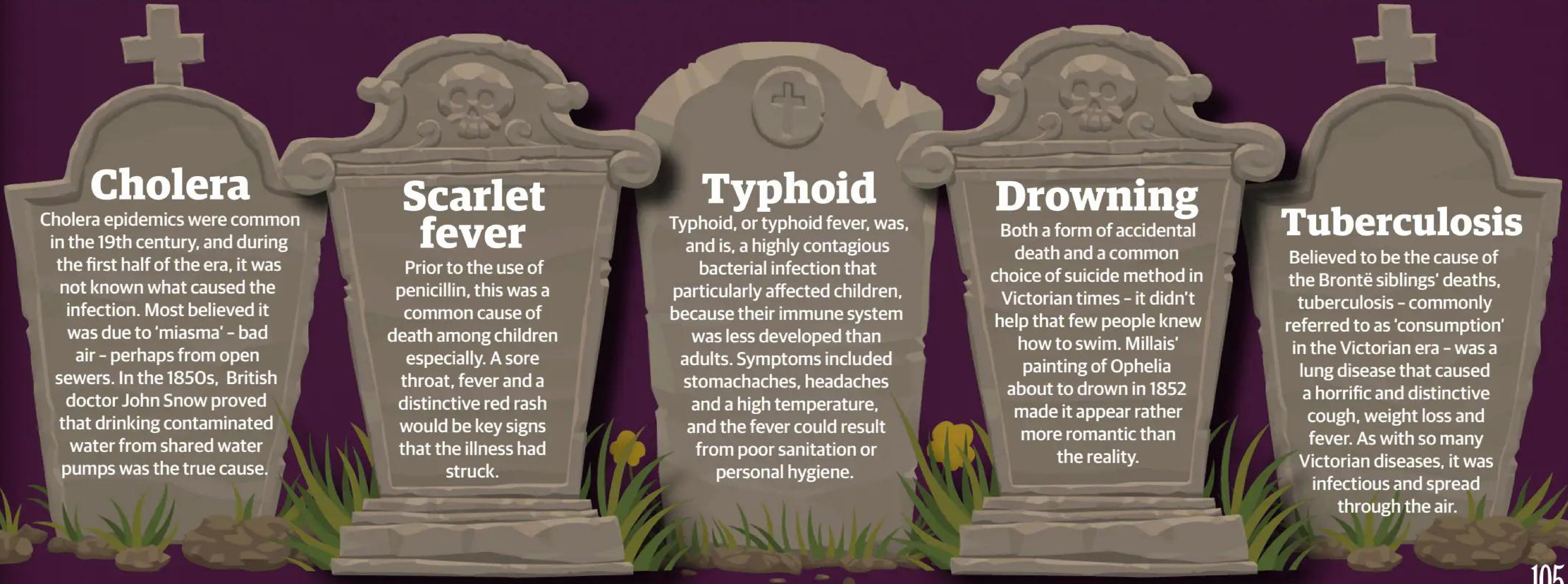
This was heightened by the growth of newspapers, which covered catastrophic events such as the Great Famine in 1840s Ireland, and the deaths of the famous, the rich, and even the poor. In addition, reporters showed little restraint when writing about the horrendous living conditions of the urban poor in grisly detail.

You could not avoid death, either in reality or the media. Both in Britain and the USA, the press detailed strange, unpleasant demises, and the post-mortems that followed them. The Victorian era also saw the creation of illustrated newspapers that depicted corpses in dramatic situations, all to titillate readers. Given the prevalence of loss in everyday life, it is perhaps only natural the Victorians tried to understand it by writing and reading about the subject, and even by shopping for the occasion.

Common killers

Death lurked around every corner, but these were the most likely culprits

Disease was rife in the Victorian era, and illnesses we shake off today could kill a century ago. Alongside these common causes of death were suicides – the result of mental maladies or financial worries – and accidental deaths, caused by industrial accidents or other workplace incidents in days before health and safety regulations. Children were killed when their clothes caught flame from nearby candles, or when they were scalded with hot water from kettles. The Victorian world was, in short, a dangerous place to live.



Cholera

Cholera epidemics were common in the 19th century, and during the first half of the era, it was not known what caused the infection. Most believed it was due to 'miasma' – bad air – perhaps from open sewers. In the 1850s, British doctor John Snow proved that drinking contaminated water from shared water pumps was the true cause.

Scarlet fever

Prior to the use of penicillin, this was a common cause of death among children especially. A sore throat, fever and a distinctive red rash would be key signs that the illness had struck.

Typhoid

Typhoid, or typhoid fever, was, and is, a highly contagious bacterial infection that particularly affected children, because their immune system was less developed than adults. Symptoms included stomachaches, headaches and a high temperature, and the fever could result from poor sanitation or personal hygiene.

Drowning

Both a form of accidental death and a common choice of suicide method in Victorian times – it didn't help that few people knew how to swim. Millais' painting of Ophelia about to drown in 1852 made it appear rather more romantic than the reality.

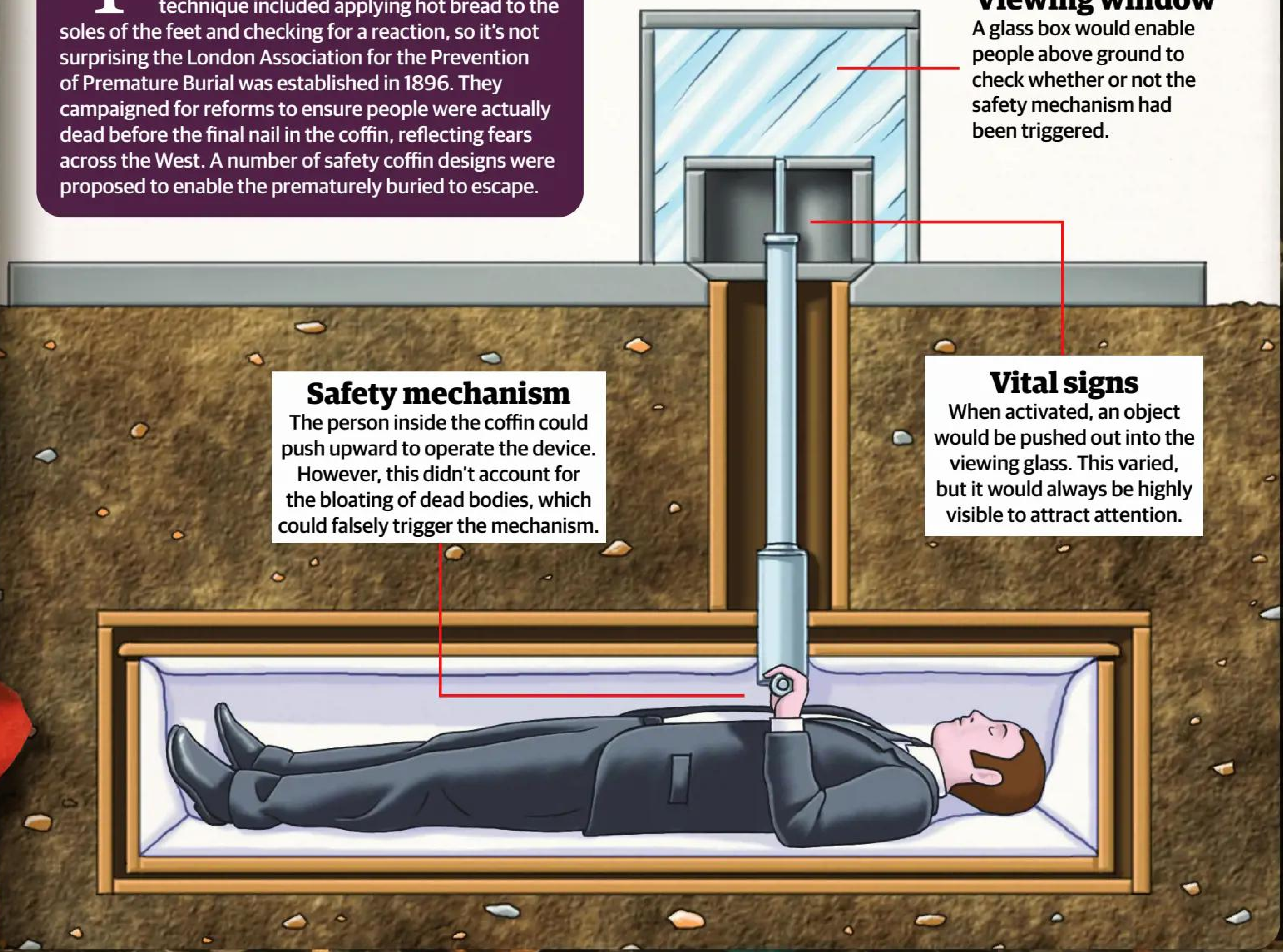
Tuberculosis

Believed to be the cause of the Brontë siblings' deaths, tuberculosis – commonly referred to as 'consumption' in the Victorian era – was a lung disease that caused a horrific and distinctive cough, weight loss and fever. As with so many Victorian diseases, it was infectious and spread through the air.

The waking dead

Fears of being buried alive led to some ingenious coffin contraptions

The inaccuracies of medical practices meant there was a real risk of a premature burial in the 19th century. To determine death, one technique included applying hot bread to the soles of the feet and checking for a reaction, so it's not surprising the London Association for the Prevention of Premature Burial was established in 1896. They campaigned for reforms to ensure people were actually dead before the final nail in the coffin, reflecting fears across the West. A number of safety coffin designs were proposed to enable the prematurely buried to escape.



Viewing window
A glass box would enable people above ground to check whether or not the safety mechanism had been triggered.

Safety mechanism
The person inside the coffin could push upward to operate the device. However, this didn't account for the bloating of dead bodies, which could falsely trigger the mechanism.

Vital signs
When activated, an object would be pushed out into the viewing glass. This varied, but it would always be highly visible to attract attention.

Dying to look good

The deceased had to go through a range of procedures to prepare for their big day

Victorian rituals started the second someone died. In the USA, curtains were drawn and clocks stopped at the time of the deceased's death. The house where they had lived would be decorated in black crape, with a wreath hung on the front door. Flowers and candles were placed around the house – not for ambience, but to mask the smell of a decomposing body, lying in state. Corpses were commonly kept at home for around four days, although the duration decreased during the Victorian era.

Photographs of family members might also be placed facedown to protect the people in them from being possessed by the dead person's spirit. In Germany, a woman known as a 'leichenfrau' (corpse bride) would tend to a body, washing and clothing it. Elsewhere, household servants or female family members would take on this role. It was important that the body looked presentable, as people would come to the house to view the dead – a custom that often involved giving visitors food and drink.

When mortuaries were established for bodies to lie in until being interred, cadavers would be watched by attendants, dressed suitably in black, as a means of reassuring the grieving relatives that their loved one was being treated in a dignified way. The attendants were often women, perhaps because of their perceived 'caring' temperament.

Both in Europe and across the Atlantic, bodies would be carried out of the house feet first, to prevent the dead's spirit from making his relatives follow him. The funeral, however, was a largely male event. In the first half of the century, upper-class women would not have gone to funerals, although they might have decorated the coffin prior to the event with flowers, or cut the dead's hair to put into lockets, brooches or rings. Even Queen Victoria did not attend the funeral of her beloved husband, Prince Albert.

Victorian death was highly ritualised, from the laying out of bodies to the horse-drawn funeral procession

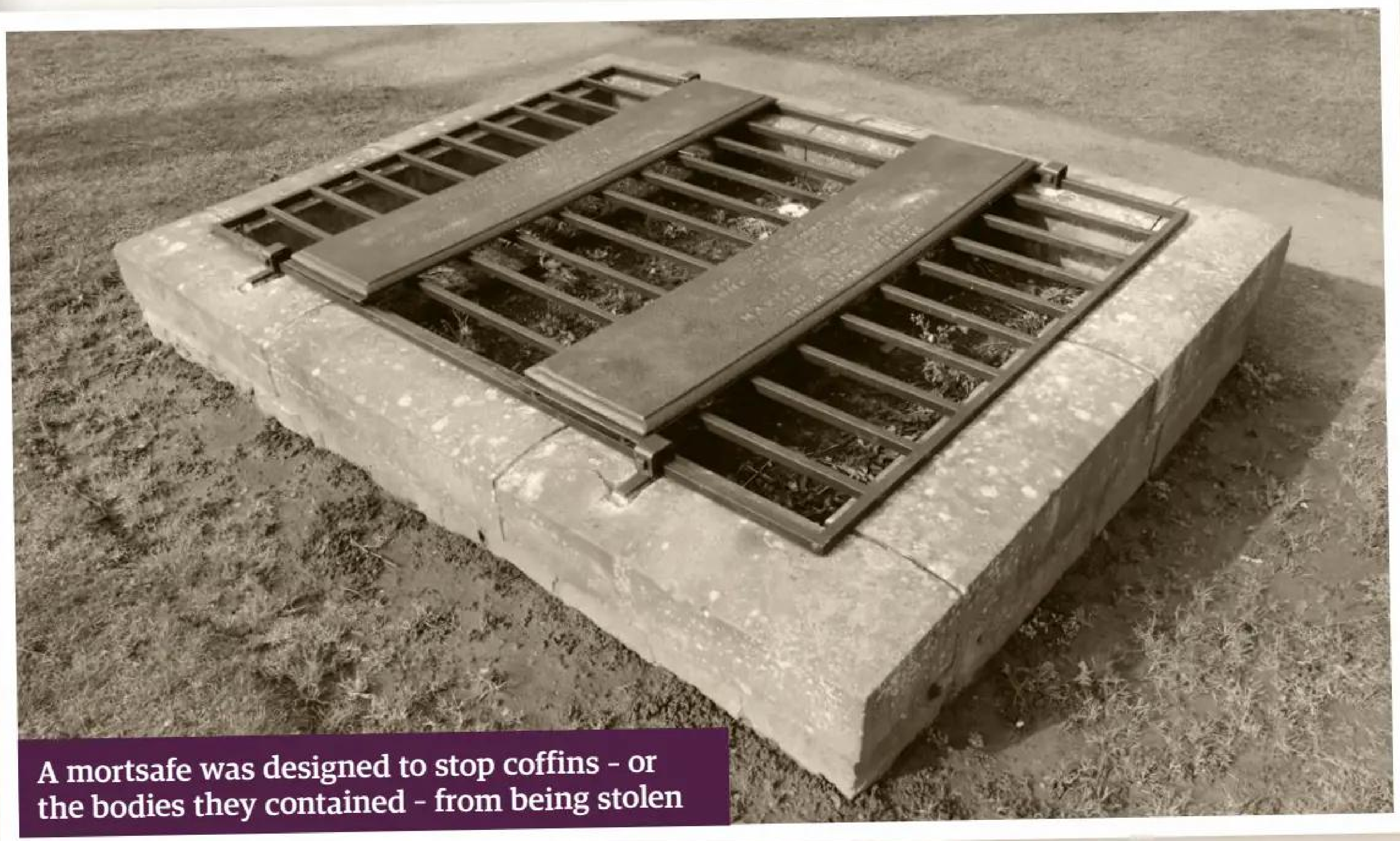
Beware the body snatchers

The extravagance involved in many death-related rituals was at odds with the rather grave matter of stealing corpses

The Victorians spent as much money as they were able to on saying goodbye to the dead, and to preserving their memories. The wealthiest would opt for a grand mausoleum, while those who were less well-off might instead commission a gravestone or memorial for their loved ones. Sculptures of angels were particularly popular, signifying a guide to heaven, and sleeping children, flowers and doves, were inscribed onto headstones as well. This desire to establish something permanent was all the more poignant given the fears of grave robbing.

The body snatchers were prominent in early-19th-century Britain, but also in the US, and made money from selling fresh cadavers to medical schools. Prior to the Victorian period, anatomy students would use criminals who had been hanged. However, as the numbers of students increased, the shortage of bodies led to rather entrepreneurial individuals digging up corpses. This caused such panic that a deceased's family and friends would watch over a body until it was buried, and iron coffins were used along with mortsafes - iron bars to protect the coffin - to prevent bodies being dug up. People even drew up wills requesting they be buried in a strong coffin.

In the UK, the 1832 Anatomy Act enabled unclaimed bodies and those donated by relatives to be used for science, effectively ending the trade in corpses. However, in the USA, this sinister business continued until the late-19th century, as more medical schools were established, and in 1878, a US congressman's body was snatched by Ohio Medical College students. But even if body snatching was becoming less common as the Victorian period progressed, the fear of it remained, along with the practice of creating a lasting memorial to a loved one.

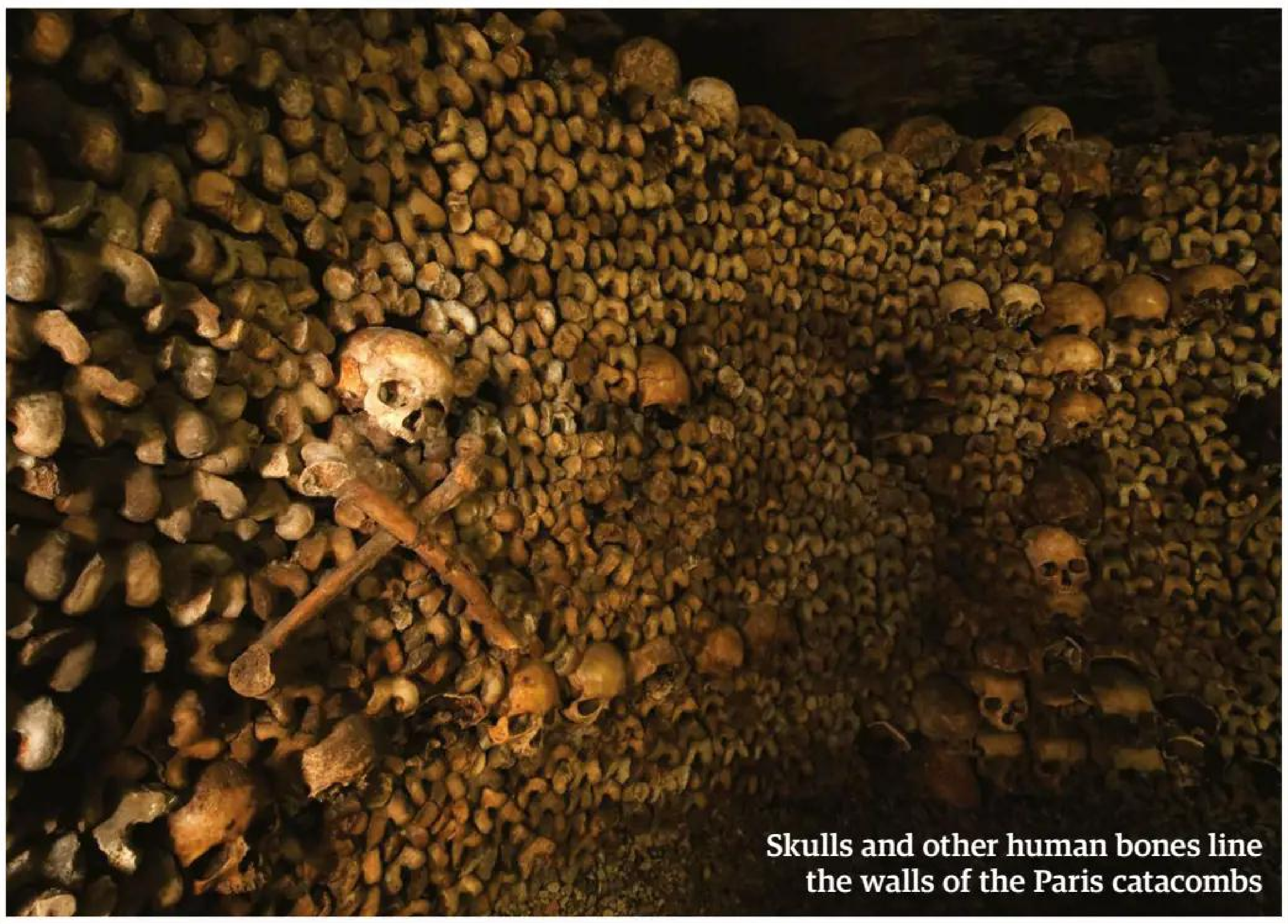


A mortsafe was designed to stop coffins - or the bodies they contained - from being stolen

Tunnels of death

Dark chambers beneath Paris keep the remains of 6 million people

Deep beneath the heart of Paris, just south of the former city gate appropriately named the Gate of Hell, are the city catacombs. Beginning in the 1780s, the remains of more than 6 million people have gradually been moved here. The distinctive stacking of skulls that visitors can see today is a result of the renovations that took place in the early-19th century, when the cemeteries were overflowing. Remains were moved to Paris's former quarries, and skulls and bones were stacked from floor to ceiling. There were even separate rooms to display skeletal deformities and monumental tablets. From 1850, the catacombs opened to the public four times a year, and as interest grew, this was eventually increased to daily visits in the 1900s and has remained a macabre attraction ever since.

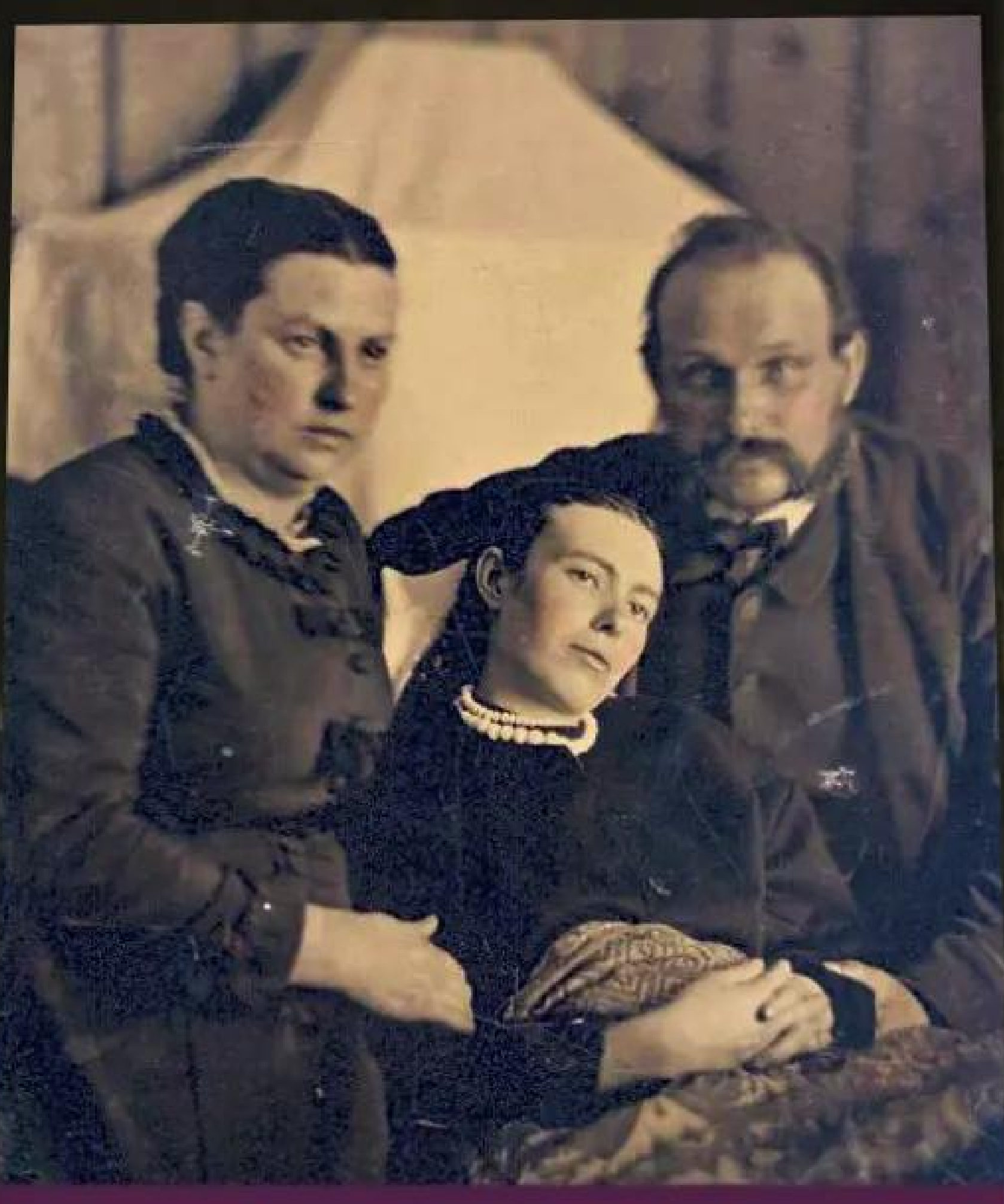


Skulls and other human bones line the walls of the Paris catacombs

20 metres
The depth is equivalent to a five-storey building

800 metres
The length of the galleries in the ossuary

14°c
The constant temperature in the catacombs



This couple were photographed with their deceased daughter, as a reminder of her

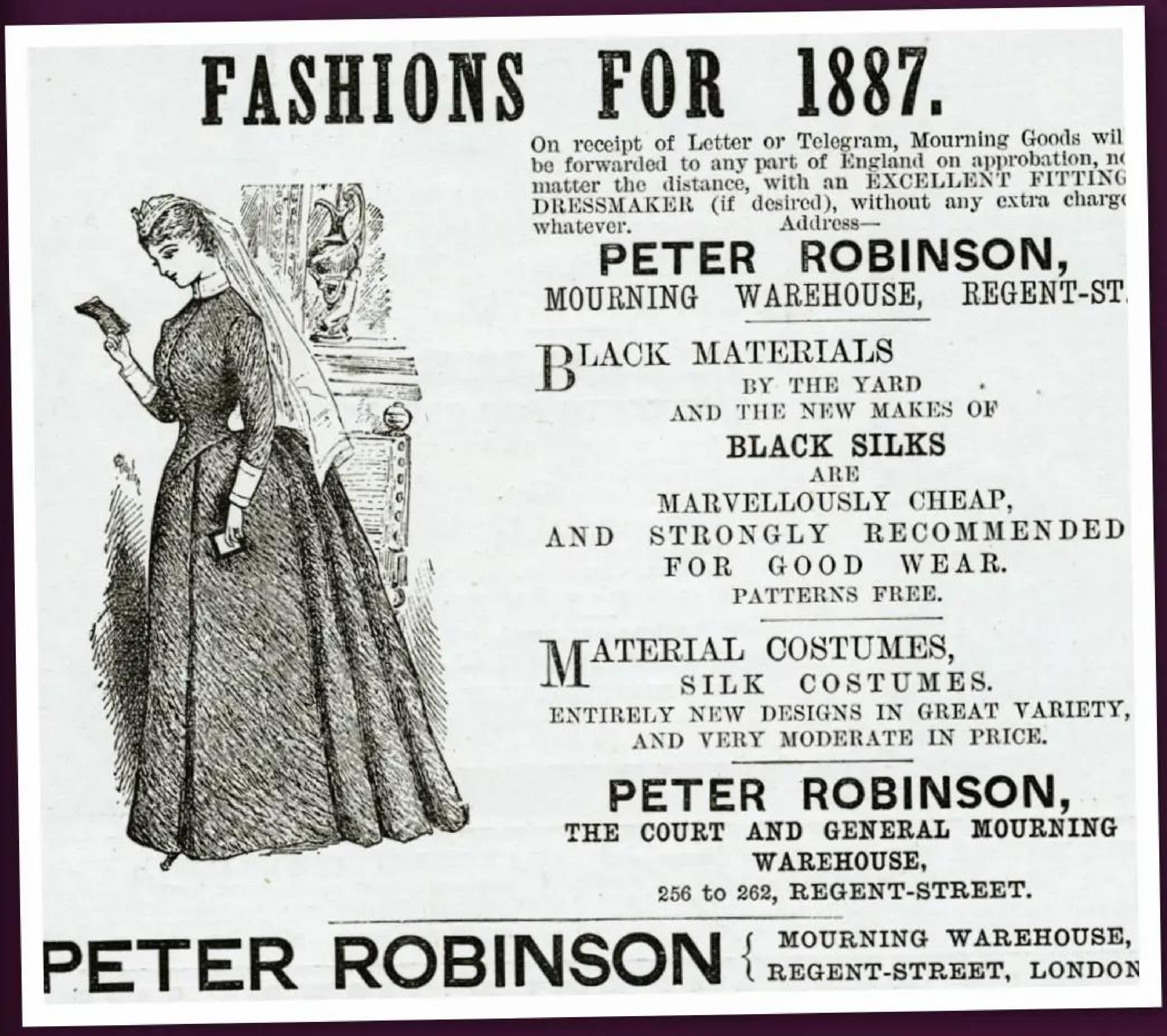
Mourning rituals

From dress to funeral etiquette, the Victorians had strict rules on how to deal with death

Queen Victoria was a deeply unpopular queen for many years after the death of Prince Albert. It was felt she had gone overboard with mourning for her much-loved husband, wearing widow's weeds for longer than was traditional and hiding herself away. For there were rules and expectations surrounding how Victorians should deal with death and its attendant rituals. Even what they wore was subject to detailed procedures - so much so that household manuals advised readers as to what was appropriate and how long a particular outfit should be worn. Initially, women wore deepest mourning clothes that were black and made of silk, bombazine or crepe. Then, gradually, the colours could lighten, becoming grey or mauve. The length of time they wore mourning clothes depended on who died - a husband required two years' mourning, while a cousin required one month.

> "The superstitious Victorians saw it as unlucky to store mourning outfits at home between uses"

With mourning clothes required, so too were shops specialising in such outfits. This was especially so, as the superstitious Victorians saw it as unlucky to store mourning outfits at home 'between uses' and so disposed of their clothes once the period of mourning had ended, buying new outfits each time someone died. Black-edged stationery was also required, and when the deceased's family wished to signal that they were ready to socialise again, they were supposed to leave cards with their friends - if they didn't, these friends would leave them alone, to respect their privacy. If cards were left for them to inquire as to their well-being, they were expected to send cards back with "thanks for kind inquiries" written on them. As with many Victorian customs, it was all about one's social appearance, and one magazine noted that "established customs" should be adhered to simply to avoid "shocking" society and appearing "heartless".



FASHIONS FOR 1887.

On receipt of Letter or Telegram, Mourning Goods wil be forwarded to any part of England on approbation, n matter the distance, with an EXCELLENT FITTING DRESSMAKER (if desired), without any extra charg whatever.

Address—

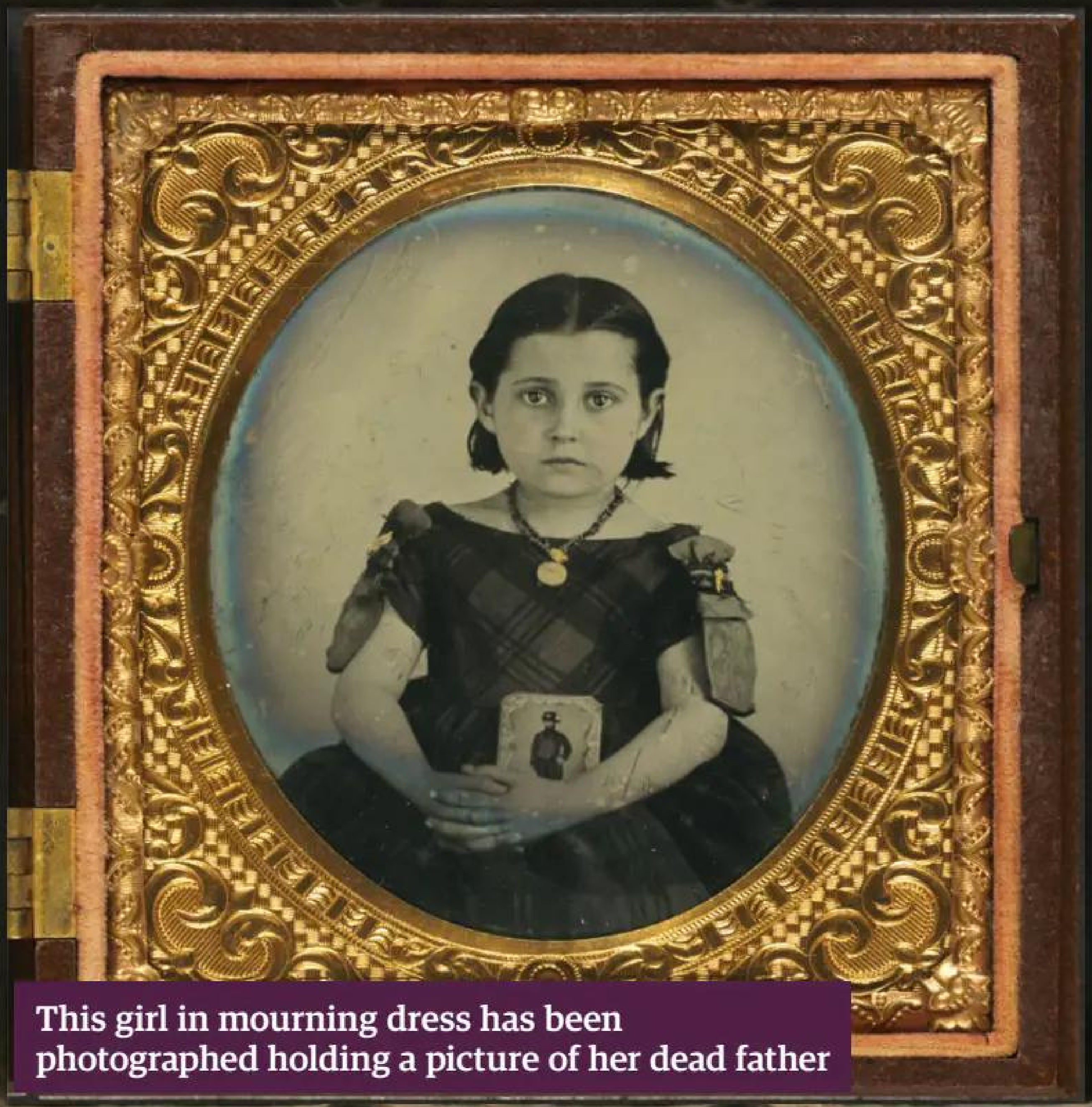
PETER ROBINSON,
MOURNING WAREHOUSE, REGENT-ST.

BLACK MATERIALS
BY THE YARD
AND THE NEW MAKES OF
BLACK SILKS
ARE
MARVELLOUSLY CHEAP,
AND STRONGLY RECOMMENDED
FOR GOOD WEAR.
PATTERNS FREE.

MATERIAL COSTUMES,
SILK COSTUMES.
ENTIRELY NEW DESIGNS IN GREAT VARIETY,
AND VERY MODERATE IN PRICE.

PETER ROBINSON,
THE COURT AND GENERAL MOURNING
WAREHOUSE,
256 to 262, REGENT-STREET.

PETER ROBINSON { MOURNING WAREHOUSE,
REGENT-STREET, LONDON

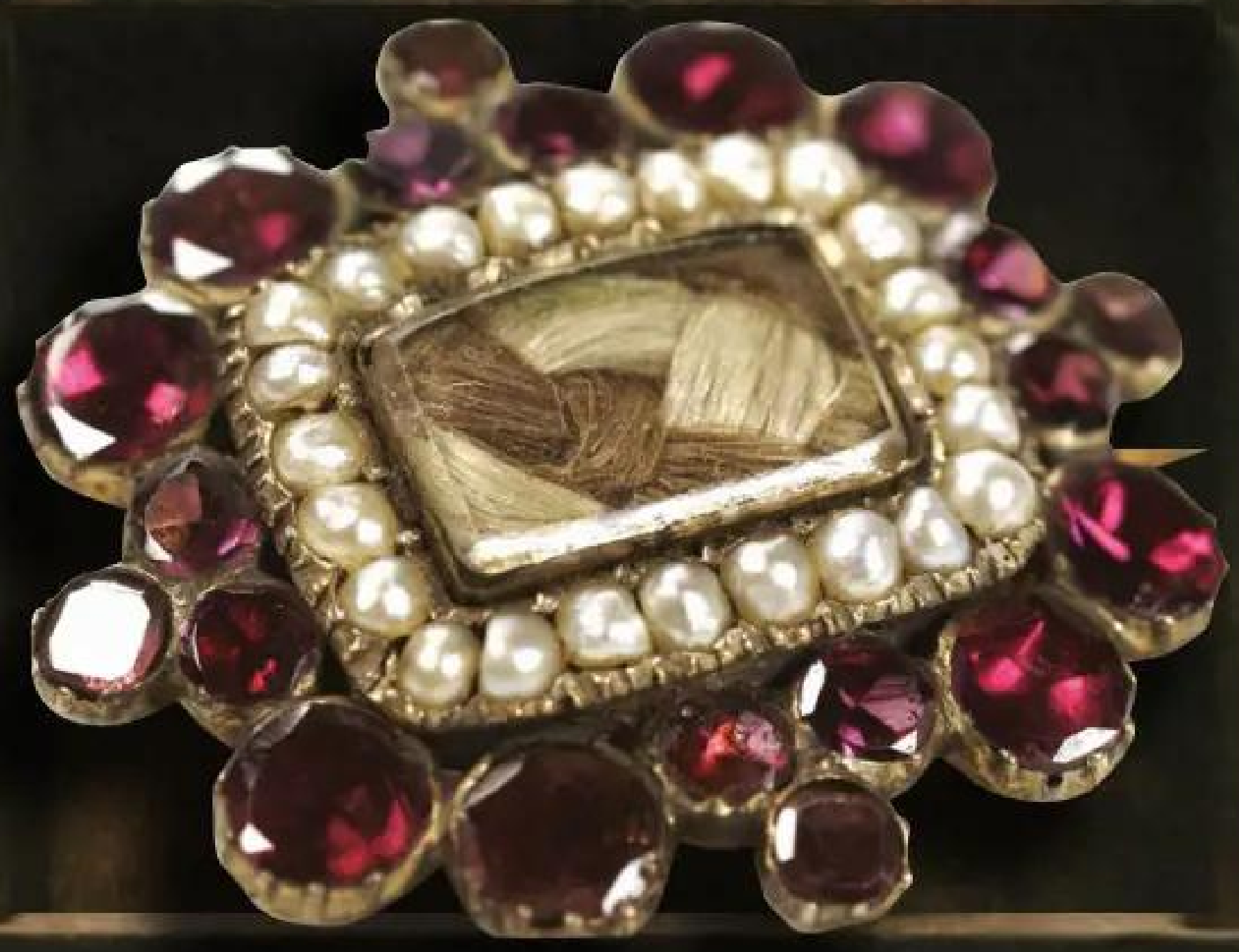


This girl in mourning dress has been photographed holding a picture of her dead father

Memento mori

These artistic reminders of mortality were prized by Victorians

Memento mori - meaning 'remember you will die' - were, in Victorian times, physical reminders of mortality, and could take various forms. Watches decorated with phrases relating to death, rings featuring locks of hair from deceased loved ones, brooches featuring skull designs or images - items such as these were used to both remember the dead and to remind the living that they would follow suit. At the most disturbing level to modern minds, the Victorians also took post-mortem photographs of the dearly departed, often posed with their surviving relatives. Due to the cost, this would sometimes be the only photograph ever taken of an individual.



A Victorian mourning brooch often contained the hair of a deceased relative

Speaking to the dead

How creative con artists became the talk of Victorian society

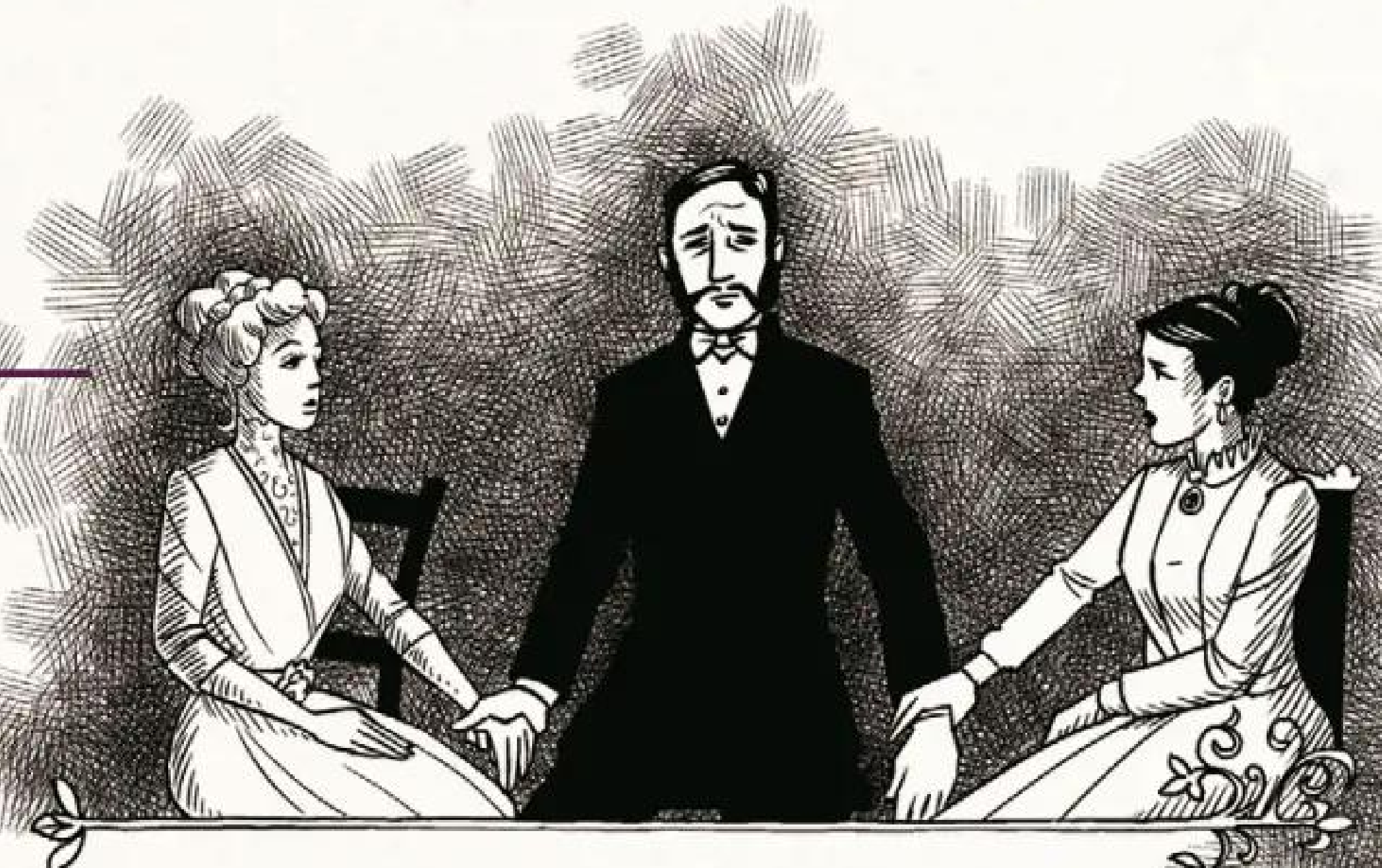
Spiritualism - the belief that ghosts exist and we can communicate with them - came into being as a movement in 1848 via three American sisters: Leah, Margaret and Kate Fox. The trio hit the headlines with a sensational (and totally bogus) ghost story in which they said they had communicated with the spirit haunting their home using a series of knocks - one for 'yes', two for 'no'. Rumours soon spread that the spirit belonged to a murdered peddler whose body was hidden in the cellar. The women were quickly promoted as mediums, making a fortune by holding crowded séances where they would contact the deceased at the audience's command.

With this business model behind them, mediums began to spring up all over the USA and then in Britain, holding intimate gatherings in darkened homes or more outlandish spectacles in music halls and theatres - for a fee.

Some might have been well-intentioned, genuinely convinced they could contact the dead, but most were frauds, using dim gaslight, sleight of hand and ingenious contraptions to hoodwink the vulnerable. Sadly, many were only too willing to believe. With technology advancing at an unbelievable pace, anything seemed possible. If they could send messages between continents via cables, then why couldn't they communicate with the afterlife?

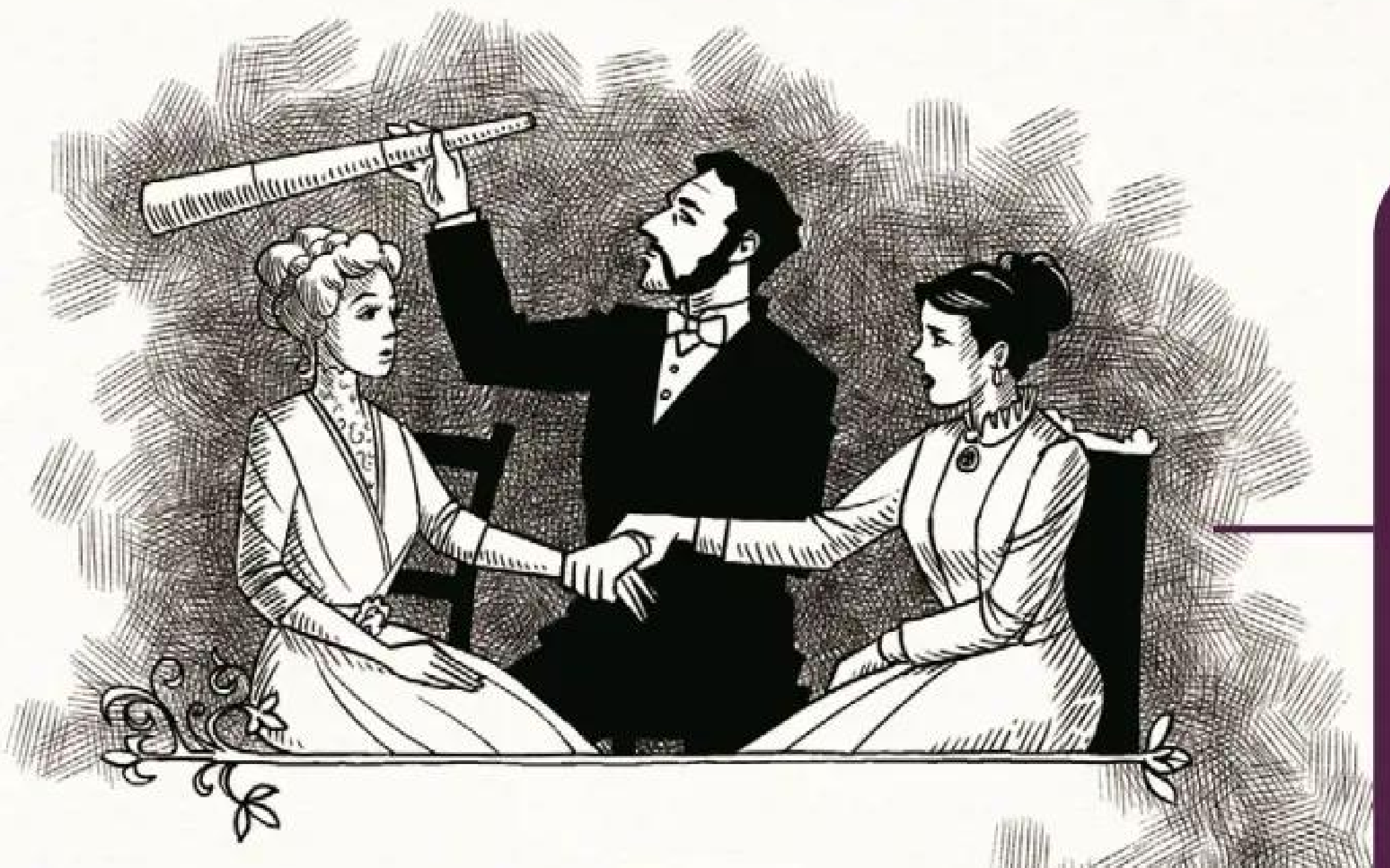
Take my hand

The lights are turned down or put out completely and the medium invites the participants to hold hands, or hold the wrist of the person to their left or right, to prove there's no foul play.



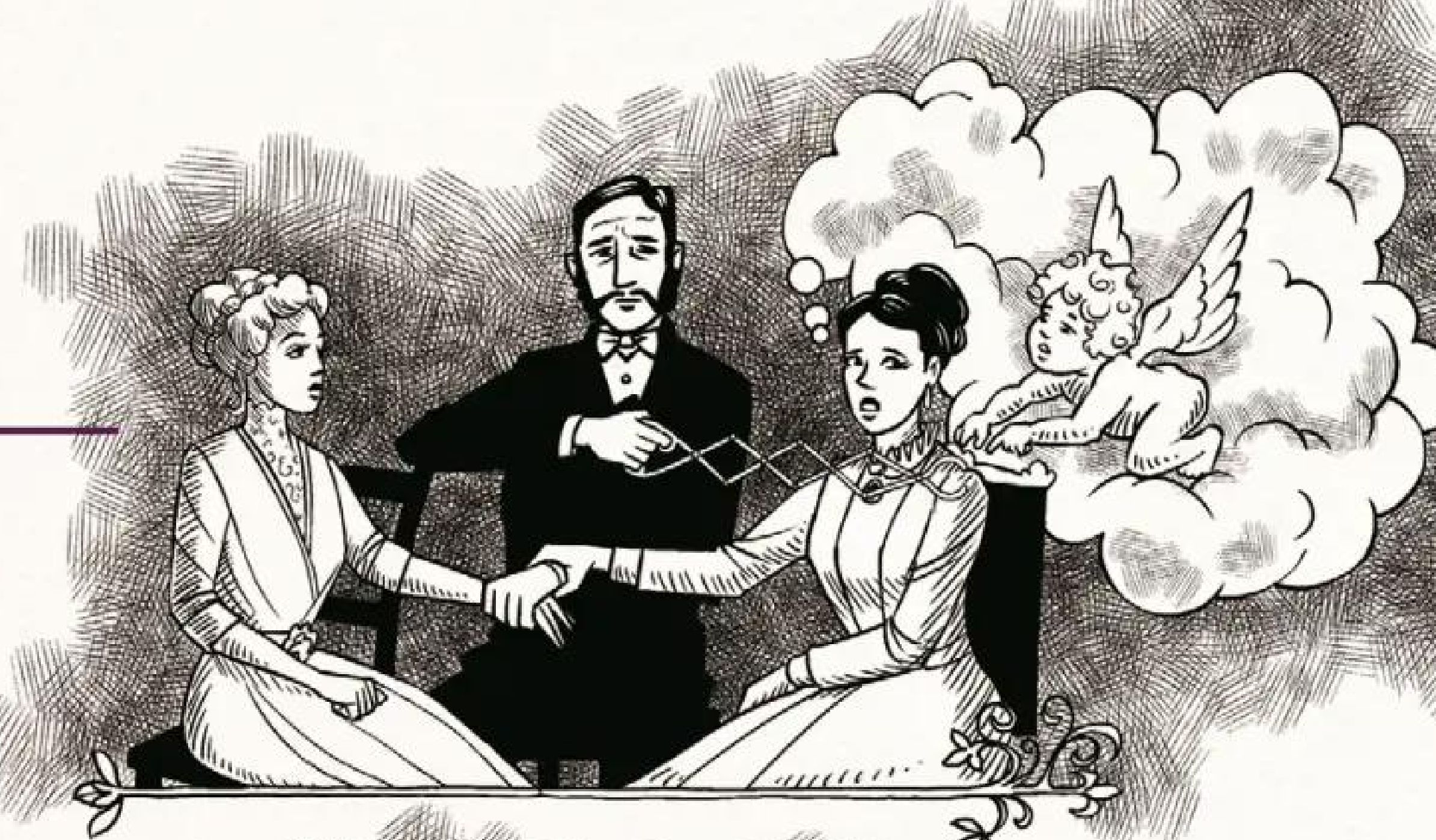
The spirits arrive

Pretending to enter a trance to communicate with the spirits, the medium twitches and jerks one hand loose. Scrambling for it in the dark, the participants either side don't realise they've been tricked into taking the same hand.



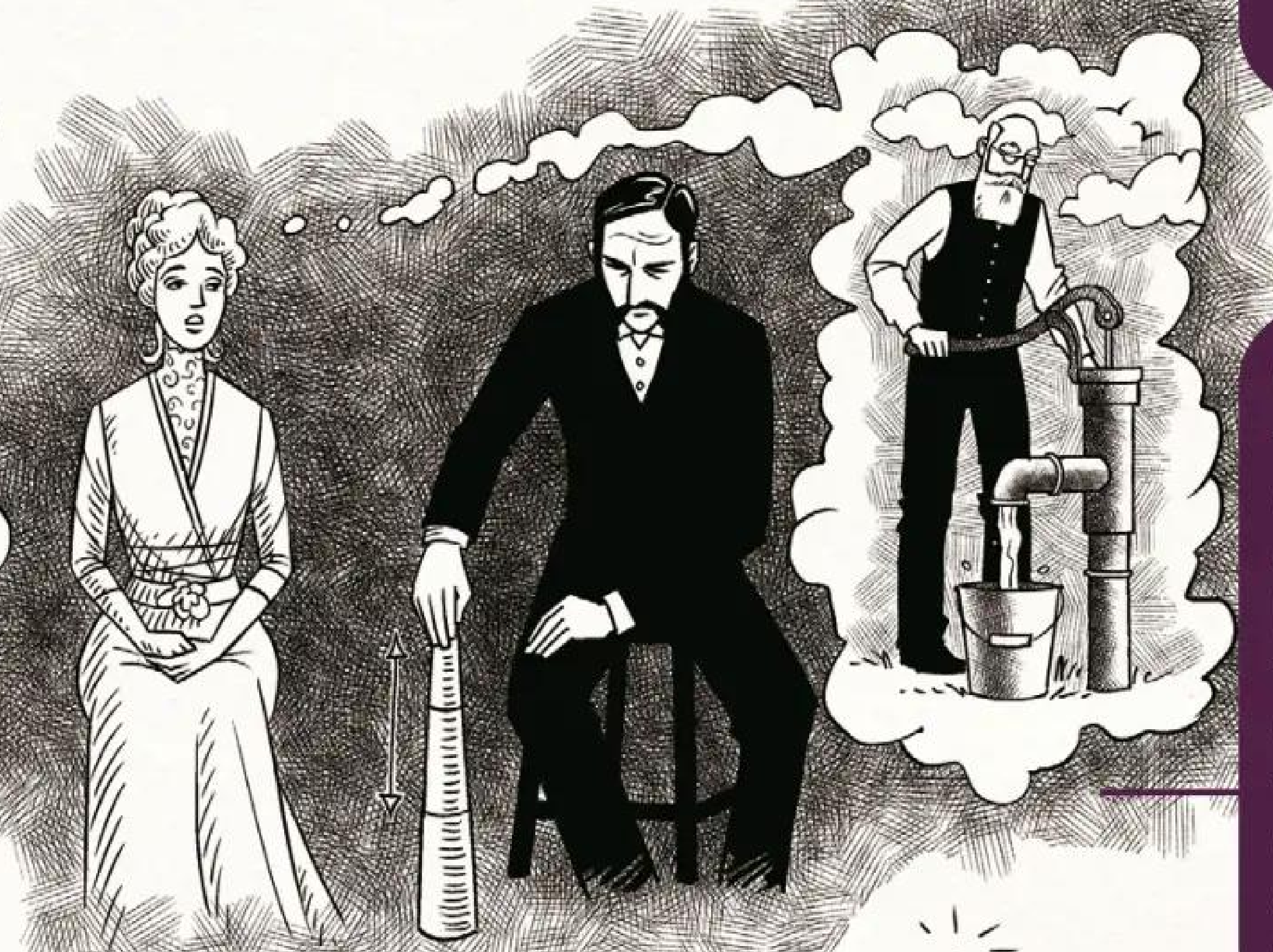
The spirits reach out

Using either their own hand, a waxwork replacement, a stuffed glove or a telescopic rod to reach across the table, the medium can now pretend a spirit is touching the audience.



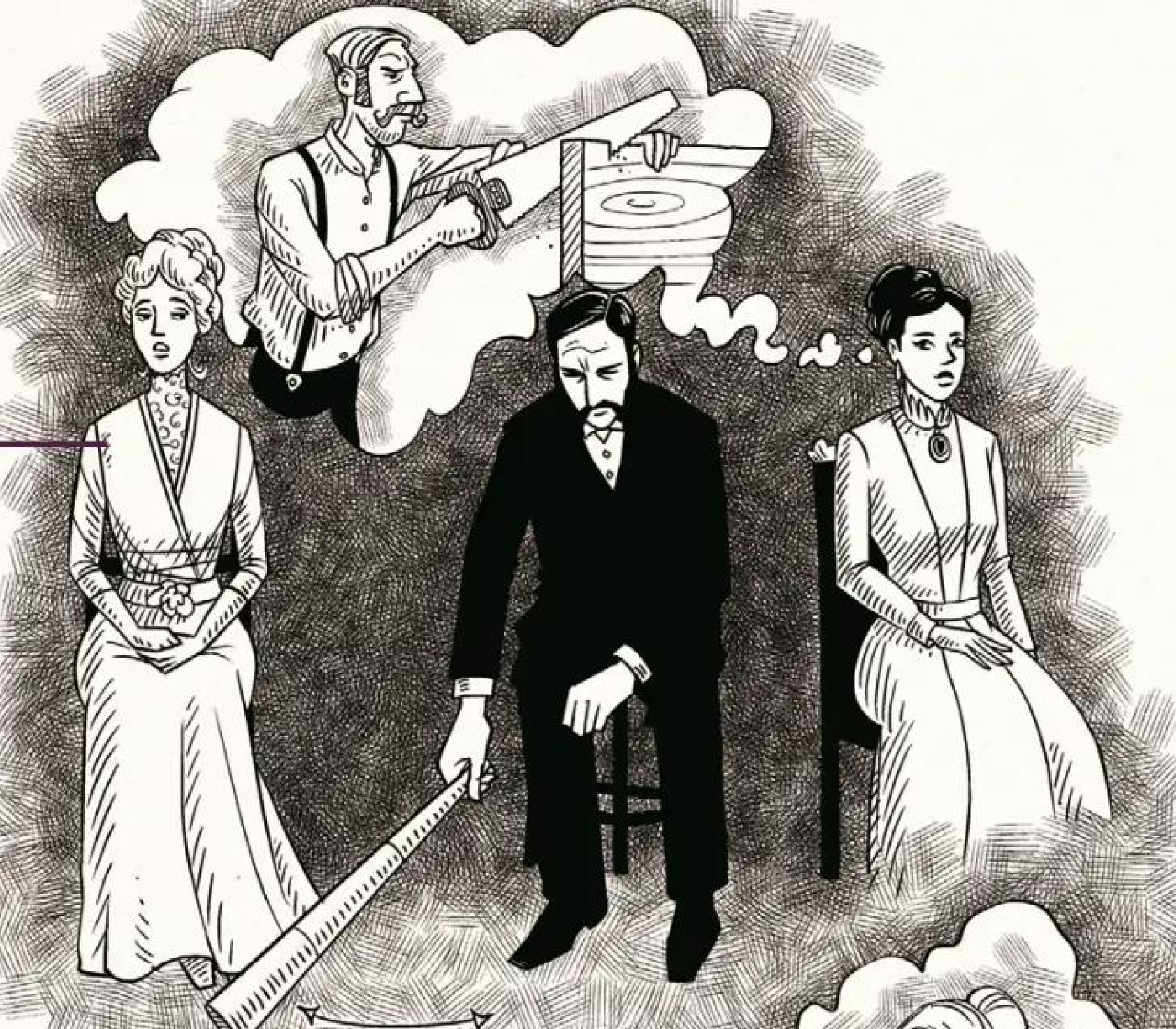
Ghostly wheezing

One account from 1925 detailed a ghostly farmer being summoned from the grave. The sound of him pumping water was produced by a collapsible trumpet being surreptitiously opened and closed.



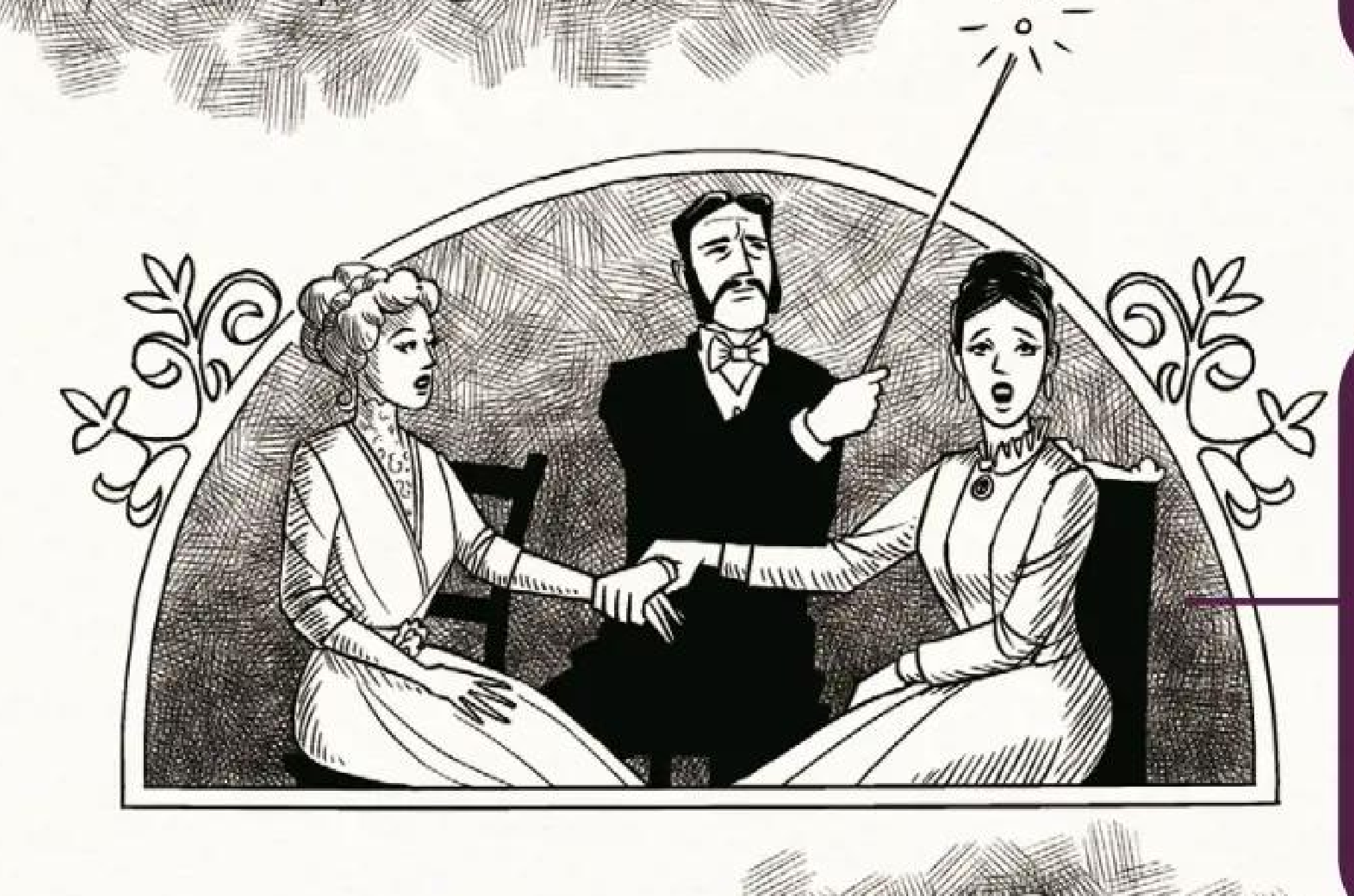
Sound effects

Should the ghostly tradesman have required it, the sound of sawing wood could be made by dragging the trumpet across the floor or moving the collapsible sections up and down within each other.



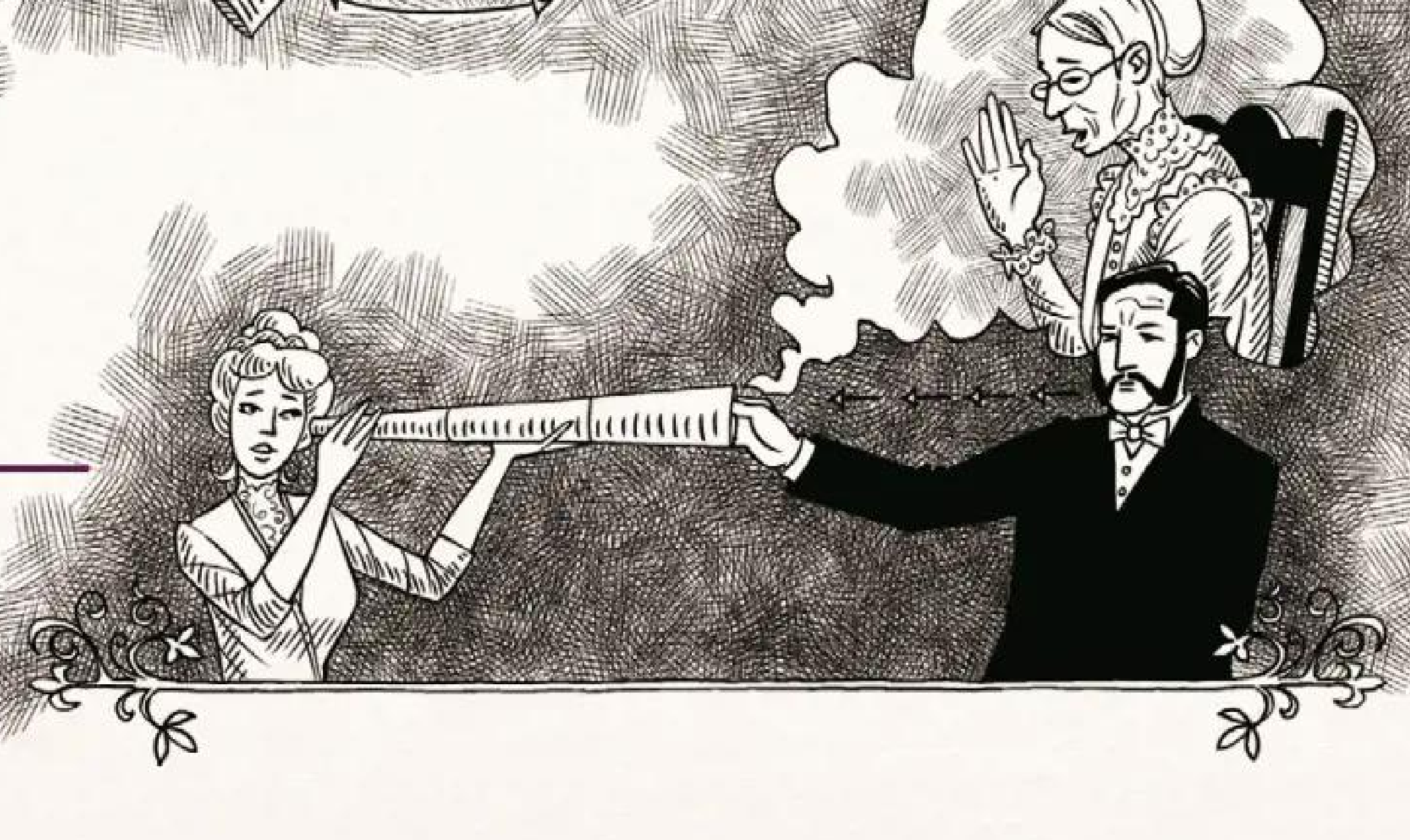
Spectral lights

Mysterious glowing orbs, objects or even faces could be produced by adding a dab of luminous paint to a stick, which would then appear to hover above the table.



Voices from the void

In other séances the trumpet would be the centre of attention rather than a sneaky secret, channelling spooky whispers from the beyond - either the medium was a ventriloquist or he had a hidden accomplice.



Deadly drowning

Most distressingly, one account recalls a medium sneaking a bowl of water onto the table and blowing through a straw to simulate drowning. He cried out, "Help me! Help me!" for good measure.

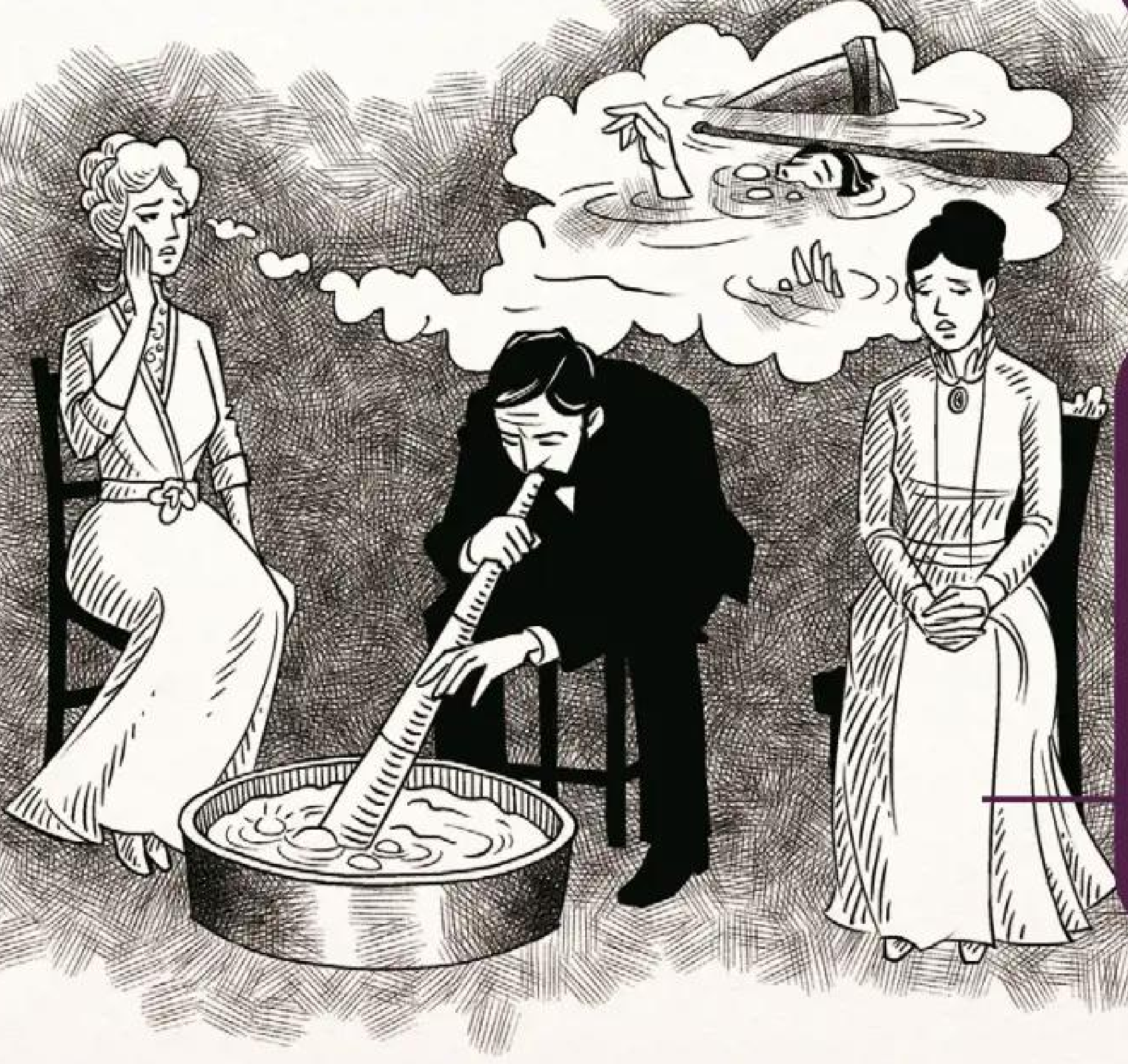
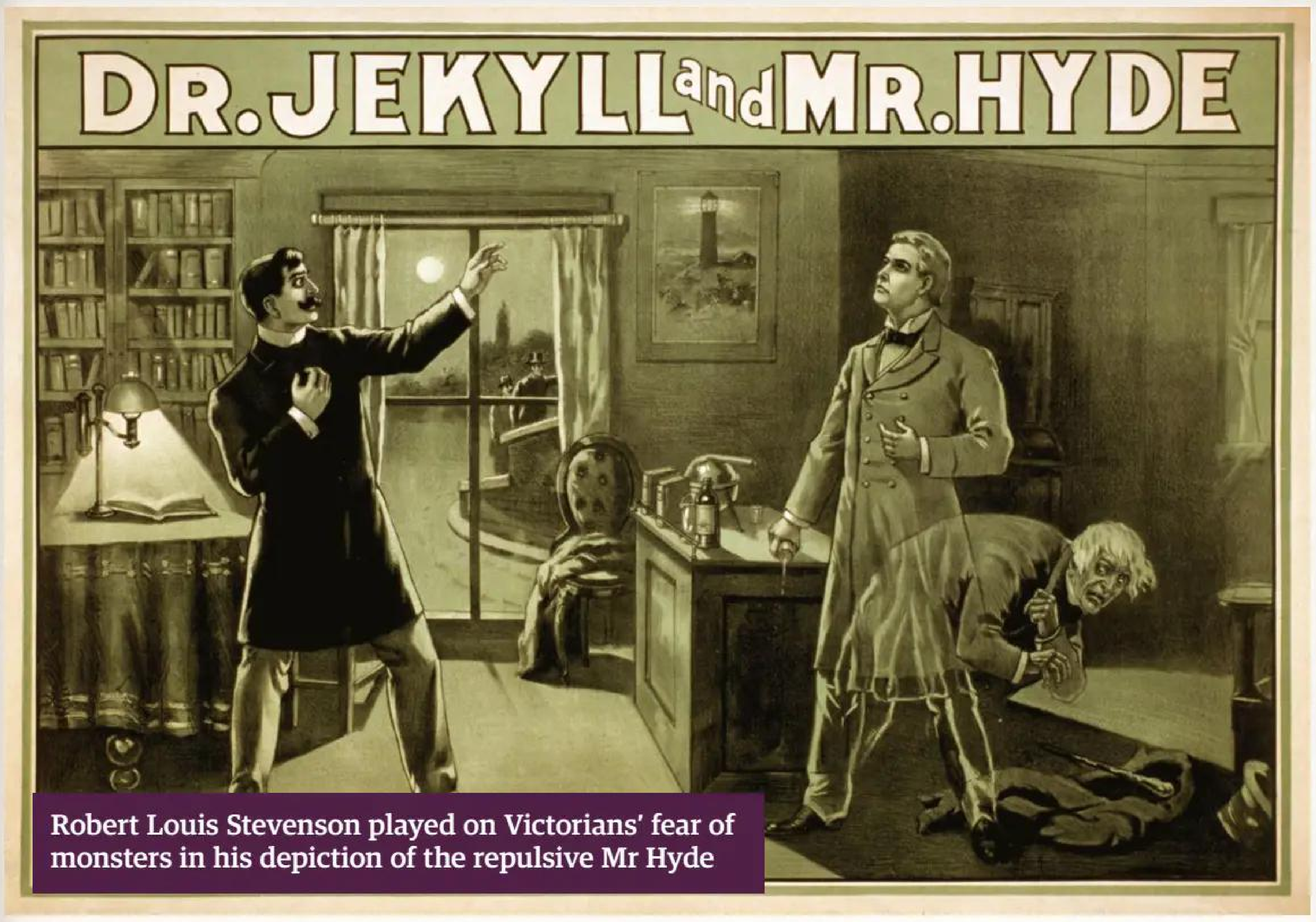


Illustration by Geri Ford / Art Agency


DR. JEKYLL and MR. HYDE

Robert Louis Stevenson played on Victorians' fear of monsters in his depiction of the repulsive Mr Hyde

Telling ghost stories

In an era of austere poverty and high mortality, the Victorians developed an appetite for horror

Gothic fiction was a type of horror story that originated in the late-18th century, but peaked during the Victorian era. From Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) to Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case Of Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde* (1886), Victorian audiences were fed a literary diet of monsters and ghouls, both entertaining and frightening in equal measure.

This genre of fiction was not restricted to Britain; in Germany, the Schauerroman ('shudder novel') featured similar motifs, while in Russia, Vladimir Odoevsky penned *The Living Corpse* in 1838, with Aleksey Konstantinovich Tolstoy publishing *The Vampire* two years later. The most famous purveyor of Gothic fiction in the USA was Edgar Allan Poe, and his tales of madness were seen as following the German style of Gothic horror. *The Fall Of The House Of Usher* and his poem *The Raven* still send chills down spines today.

Victorian Gothic horror frequently involved death, or the fear of death, reflecting society's preoccupation with the subject – a result of high mortality rates and the constant threat of disease. Panics about crime and rural to urban migration also sparked concerns about the stranger in one's midst. People were less likely to know their neighbours in Victorian times than they would have done in earlier, more stable, rural communities, and the increasing number of strangers led to them being demonised in fiction.

The after-effects of the industrial revolution were felt in depictions of cities as sprawling, dark places, and the growing gap between rich and poor was also portrayed as something evil, as shown in works by authors such as Bram Stoker and Charles Dickens. But most of all, the obsession with Gothic literature reflected the Victorians' similar obsession with mortality, death, and mourning.

The meaning of monsters

19th-century authors created characters that played on contemporary fears about strangers, crime and disease. Here are the most famous

Dracula
Count Dracula, a vampire, was a creature caught between life and death. He is thought to reflect fears of immigration and sexual promiscuity. Being bitten is akin to being diseased, with 'cures' being sought to make the bitten well again.

Mr Hyde
The mysterious, hunchbacked Hyde is the alter-ego of Dr Jekyll, who has created a potion that enables him to become this repulsive being. Hyde represented both sex – something Victorians were keen to 'hide' – and the supernatural.

Frankenstein's monster
Victor Frankenstein's creation of a monster made of body parts from dead criminals reflected concerns about body snatchers, and how medicine and science – in particular, the development of electricity – could be used for evil as well as good.

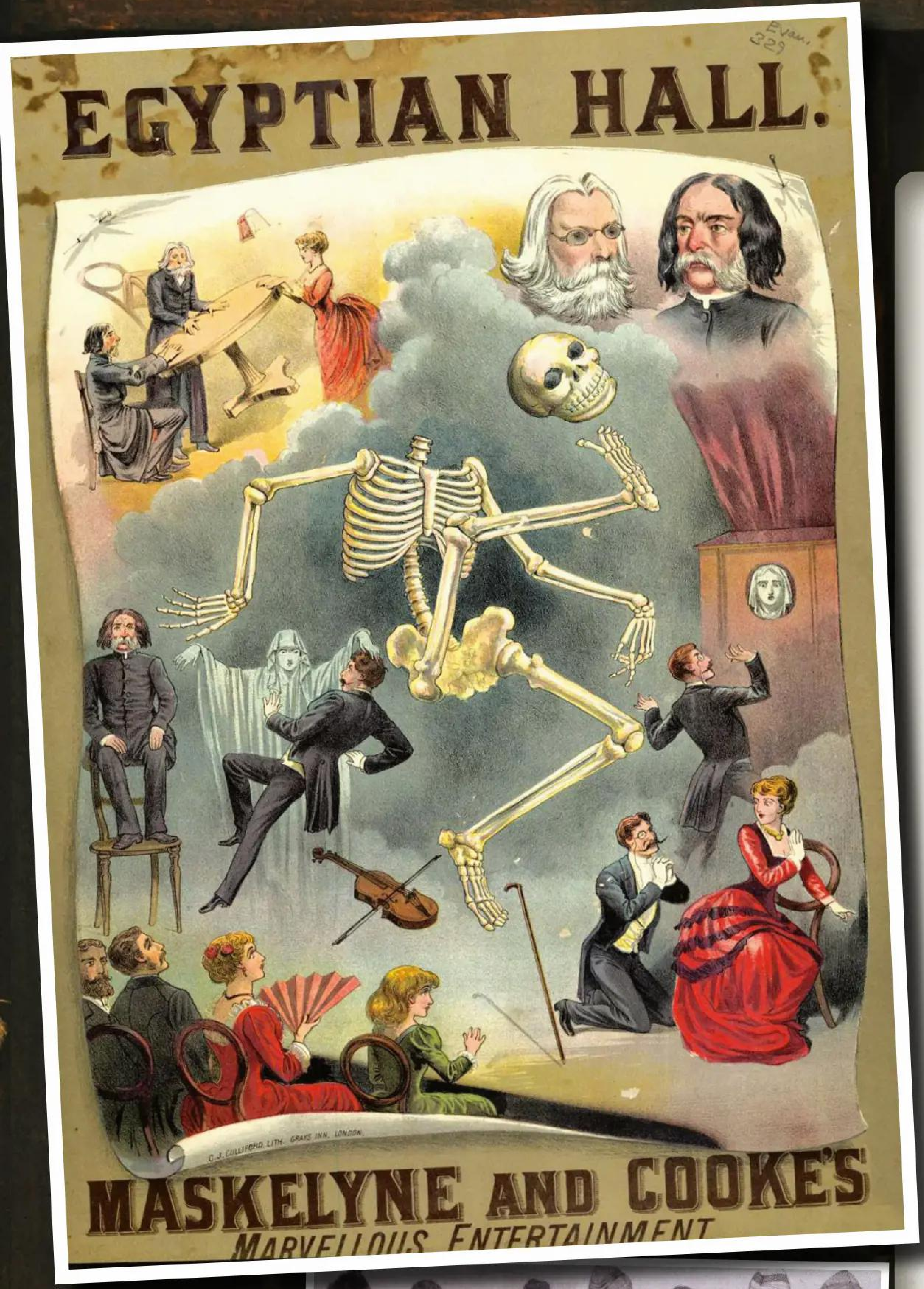
Heathcliff
The anti-hero of *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff is not a monster per se, but is certainly monstrous. He comes from an unknown background, is cruel and feared by others. His darkness and outcast status make him akin to Hyde and Frankenstein's monster.

Murder & mayhem at The Grand Guignol

Before slasher movies, there was a French theatre of terror that turned stomachs

Opening in 1897, Paris's Théâtre du Grand-Guignol shocked and thrilled audiences with murder and torture so realistic it made people vomit and faint. It was originally designed to explore subjects not normally seen as fit for theatre – criminals, prostitutes and sinister asylums – to criticise the social inequalities of the era; its name was taken from a violent French puppet, in the style of English Punch and Judy, but the plays were strictly for adults.

The building had originally been a chapel, and the 'confessional'-style boxes, Gothic style and angels flanking the stage, bearing witness to the brutal acts, only added to the eerie ambience. Some plays looked at the individual consciousness and the passage from one existence to another, and this was key to the theatre's success. Death was ever present in real life, but the horrors of the Grand Guignol could actually offer comfort by helping audiences understand it – and the possibility of some form of life beyond the veil.


EGYPTIAN HALL.
C.J. CULLIFORD, LITH. GRAYS INN, LONDON.
MASKELYNE AND COOKE'S
MARVELLOUS ENTERTAINMENT

The mummy returns

As Egyptomania swept through Victorian England, centuries-old corpses inspired a wave of creepy customs

Ancient Egyptians believed in giving their dead an appropriate send-off, constructing elaborate mausolea to them, and entombing their corpses with personal possessions that might assist them in the afterlife. For the Victorians, with their morbid and complex rituals, the example of these ancient people was one to follow. Throughout the 19th century, Egyptian influences could be found in women's mourning jewellery, which often featured obelisks or scarabs, and on tombs, mausolea, cemetery gates and even entire graveyards, which had an Egyptian style of architecture or decorative features.

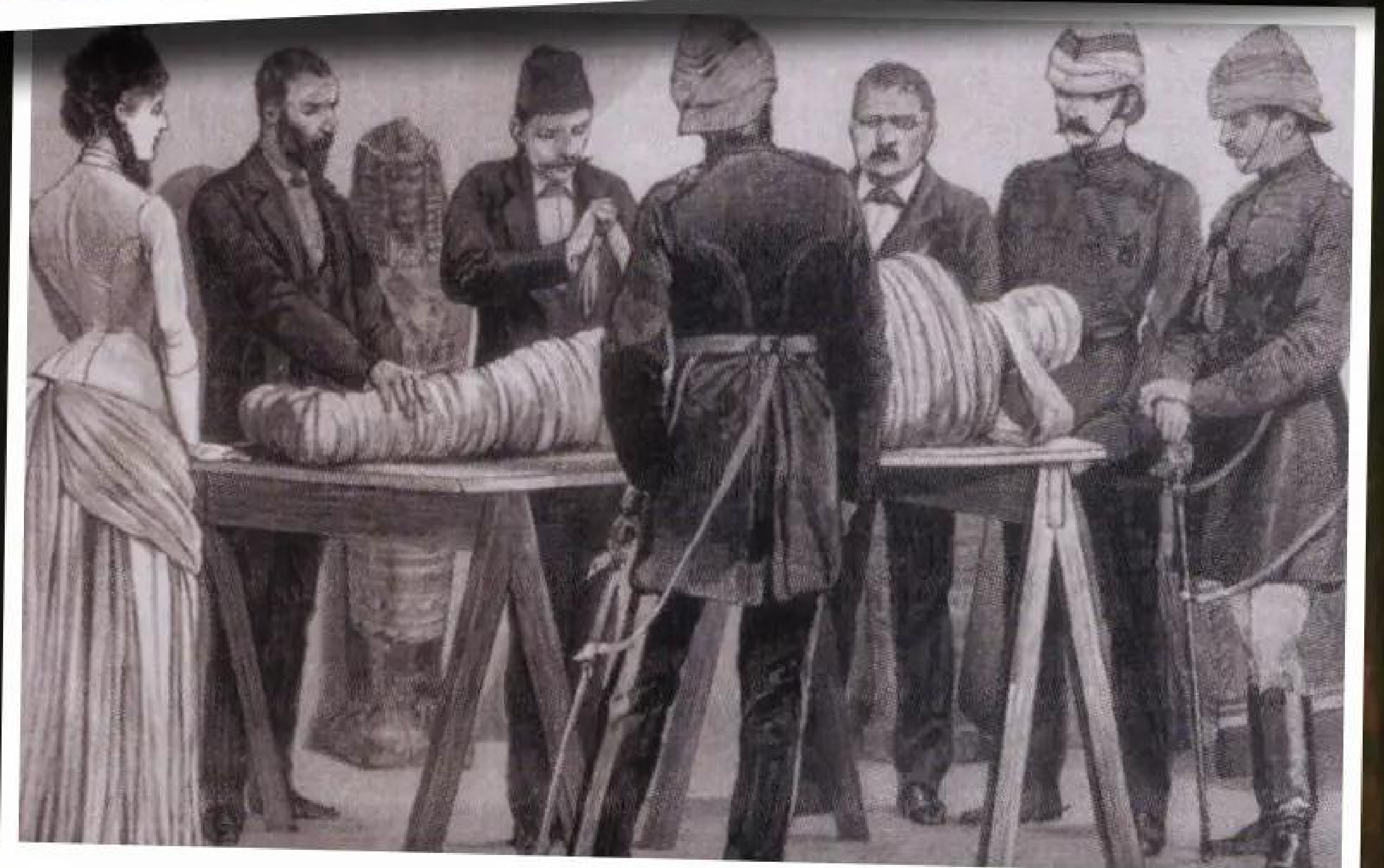
Ancient Egyptian texts were translated by German Egyptologist Karl Richard Lepsius in the 1840s, and detailed their beliefs about death and the afterlife, showing dead bodies reanimating. Naturally, the Victorians were very curious about Egyptian mummies. Antiquities had been brought from Egypt to Europe – especially England, but also Italy and Germany – in the late-18th and early-19th centuries, but now, these concealed corpses became objects of intense interest.

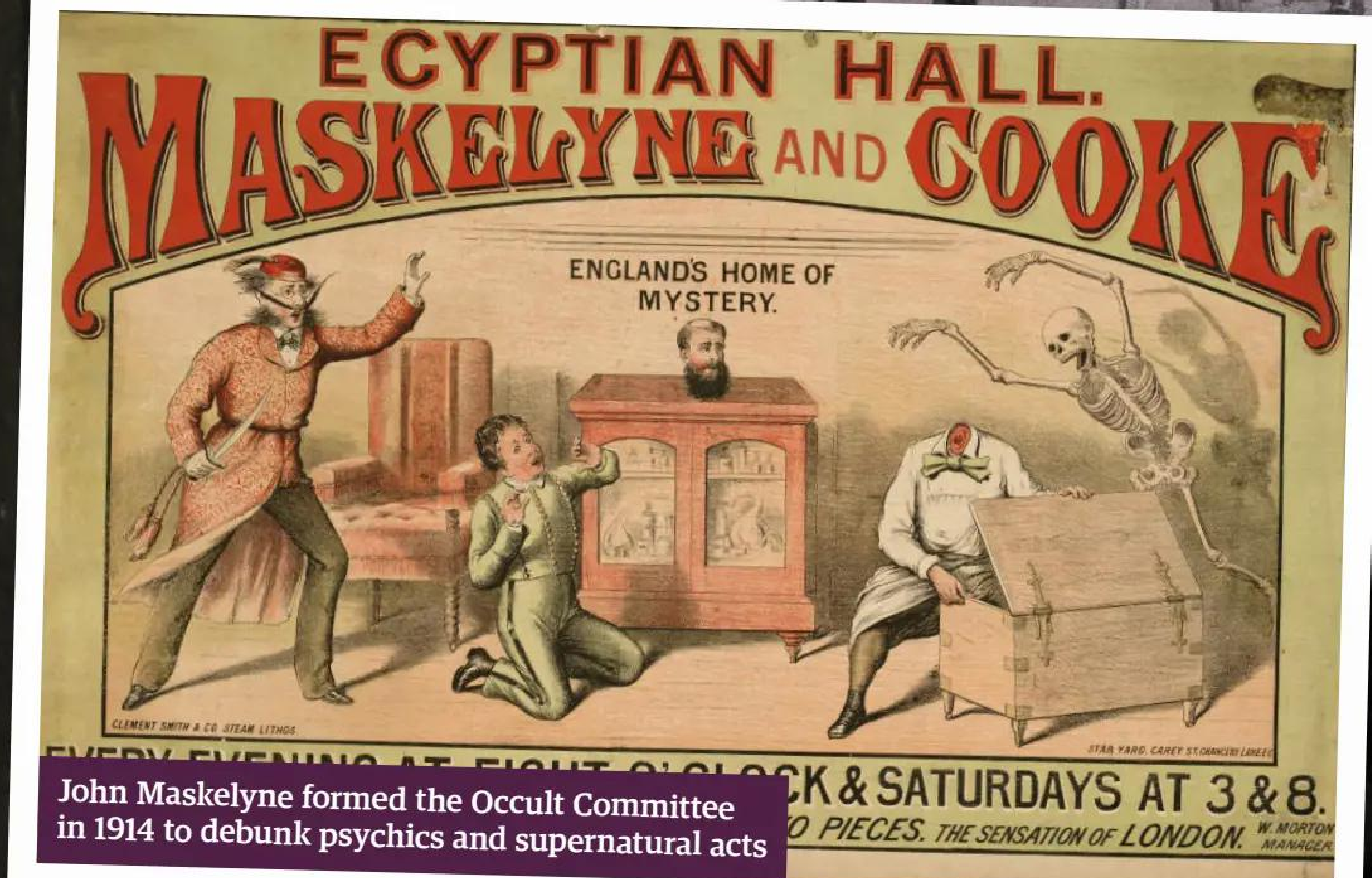
At the start of the era, surgeon Thomas Pettigrew began organising public events where people could go to watch mummies being unwrapped. However, these cod-scientific displays were, in reality, more about playing on people's desire to be scared and entertained in equal measure. Pettigrew would saw off parts of the mummy's skull, showing how the brains had been removed, and, for his grand finale, would raise the mummy to its feet, as though it was still alive. Such events continued throughout the century.

This link between fear, entertainment and science, with its specific Egyptian focus, was highlighted by the presence of the Egyptian Hall in London's Piccadilly. Built in Egyptian style in 1812, it was originally a museum designed to house curiosities from the South Seas, but by the late 1800s it was associated with séances, theatre and magic shows – consistent with the general trend toward spookiness, from the curious and enlightened 1820s to the morbidly fascinated 1880s. The in-house duo of Maskelyne and Cooke did openly fake séances and hauntings, and it became famous for 'anti spiritualism'. John Nevil Maskelyne probably wondered why he bothered. So skilful were the pair's recreations that, "...the Spiritualists had no alternative but to claim us as the most powerful spirit mediums who found it more profitable to deny the assistance of spirits."

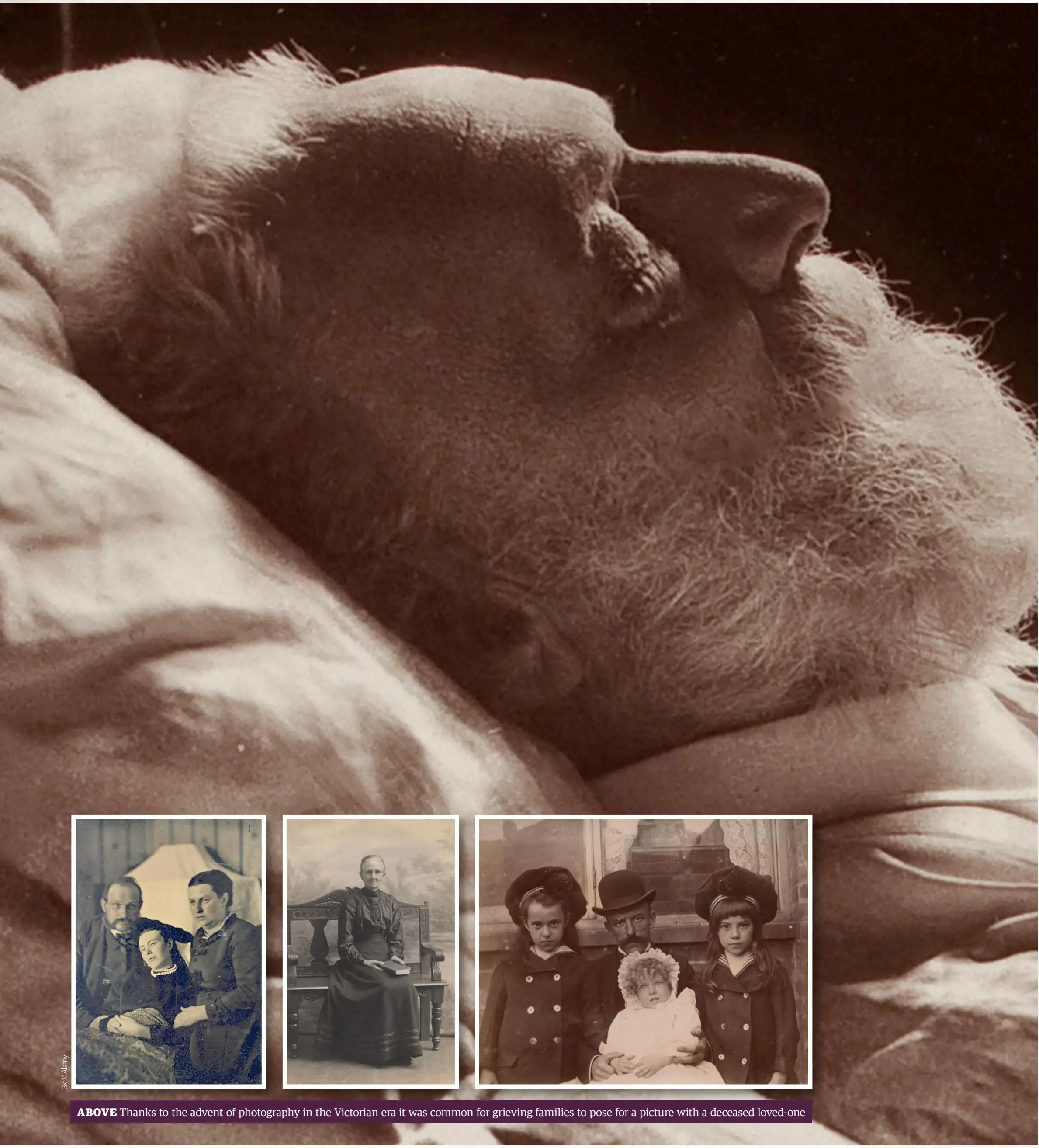
In a world that was advancing at an unprecedented pace – where steam trains carved a path through the countryside and suspension bridges loomed large on the landscape – the Victorian era was also a golden age of belief. Religion, spiritualism and magic pervaded every aspect of daily life, from literature and architecture, to fashion and social etiquette – it was a unique period in history where science and the supernatural were often one and the same.

> "For his grand finale, Pettigrew would raise the mummy to its feet, as though it was still alive"




EGYPTIAN HALL.
MASKELYNE AND COOKE
ENGLAND'S HOME OF MYSTERY.
K & SATURDAYS AT 3 & 8.
O PIECES. THE SENSATION OF LONDON.
W. MORTON MANAGER

John Maskelyne formed the Occult Committee in 1914 to debunk psychics and supernatural acts



3x © Alamy

ABOVE Thanks to the advent of photography in the Victorian era it was common for grieving families to pose for a picture with a deceased loved-one

Memento mori

Inside the disturbing world of Victorian post-mortem photography

Written by Callum McKelvie

While many things in life are unknown, an unfortunate certainty is its inevitable end. Throughout history, different cultures and societies have had their own unique approaches to this grim subject. The Ancient Egyptians, for example, had complex burial rituals, while during the medieval period religious thought, preoccupied with visions of Heaven and Hell, dominated much of western Europe. But perhaps one of the most interesting and peculiar cultures through which to examine our relationship with death is that of the Victorians. They were obsessed with the spirit world, ghosts and funeral culture. One of the most bizarre ways they demonstrated this was through the new art of post-mortem photography, which is literally what it sounds like: a photograph taken of someone after they've died. These photographs were a sensation in the latter half of the 19th century in Europe, the USA and Great Britain. For context, however, it's first important to delve a little deeper into the Victorian attitude towards death and explore some of their customs surrounding funerals. In the 19th century, in both Great Britain and the USA, death was a highly ritualised event, especially for the woman of the household. After the death of her husband, a widow was expected to be in 'deep mourning' for a year and then spend a second in 'half mourning'. Perhaps most distressingly, during the first year a widow was expected to be in strict isolation and could not receive visitors to the home or attend public events, except church. During half mourning, visitors were allowed and the widow could wear some trim on her black attire. Such was the familiarity of death to the Victorian woman that they would often make their own shroud, including them in the wedding dowry.

Post-mortem photograph of Victor Hugo, the author of *Les Miserables*

Image source: wiki/ Nadar, MOPA

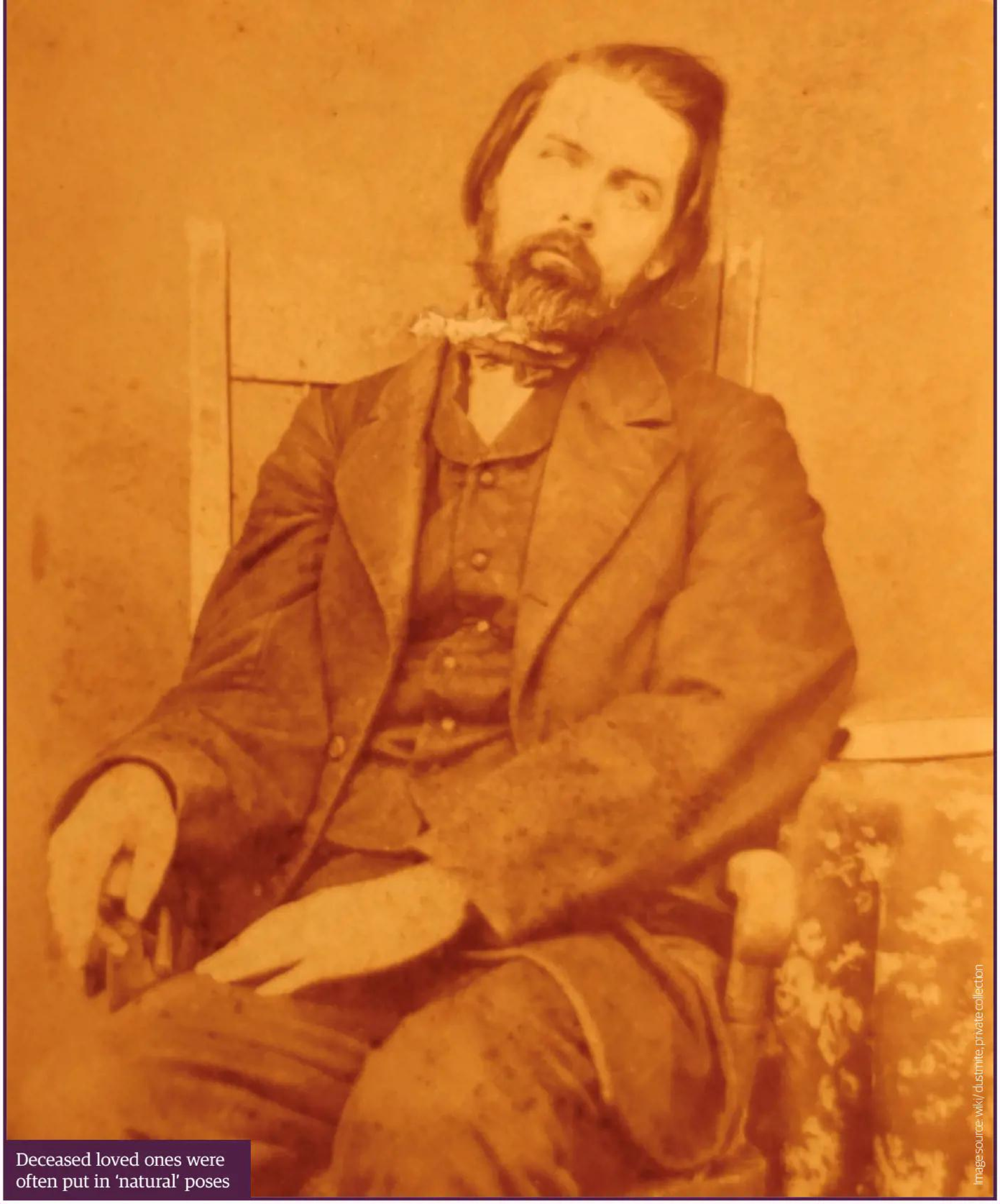
How exactly does this concern photographing dead people? Photography was at this time a new and exciting medium, and offered a permanent memento of an individual. This was the period in which people wore lockets and made jewellery or even wreaths from the hair of a dead loved one. As a result, mementos were highly sought-after and photography was a new way to obtain one. Indeed, some sources estimate that photographers were more likely to record deaths over weddings by some three to one margin. In some areas a post-mortem photography became a practice that went hand-in-hand with a funeral and images were distributed among friends and relatives.

Why was photography such a widely available and popular medium? The story of the mass-market photograph began when Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre revealed the first successful photographic method, known as 'Daguerreotype', in the 1830s. This method was based on the principle of reversing an image, using a silvered copper plate, the resultant image being a combination of silver and mercury resting on this plate. These images were extremely delicate, so much so that the components could even be brushed off. In 1851, however, Frederick Scott Archer's 'Wet Collodion Process' brought a number of advantages that made the medium incredibly popular. Firstly, numerous copies could be made (unlike Daguerrotypes) and secondly the exposure time was less (meaning images could be taken outside). Perhaps most importantly, it was cheap and its success drastically lowered the price of other methods. For example, in the US in 1850 a single Daguerreotype cost only 25 cents. Grieving families who had had no opportunity to obtain an image of their loved one during their lifetime, due to the expensive nature of portraiture, now had an opportunity to do so.

In contemporary times some of these images have seen a resurgence in interest due to the morbid way in which they were composed. While the majority seem to depict the individuals in their coffins or as if they were asleep, some of the more macabre examples have the deceased posed as if they were alive. In these photos the corpse is shown sitting or being propped up by family members. On some websites this has led to games of 'spot the cadaver' as people debate over whether an image is a post-mortem photograph or just a particularly dead-eyed model.

Prof. C.A. Bjerknes d. 29/3. 1903

Some photos were more conventional images of a corpse in an open casket



Deceased loved ones were often put in 'natural' poses

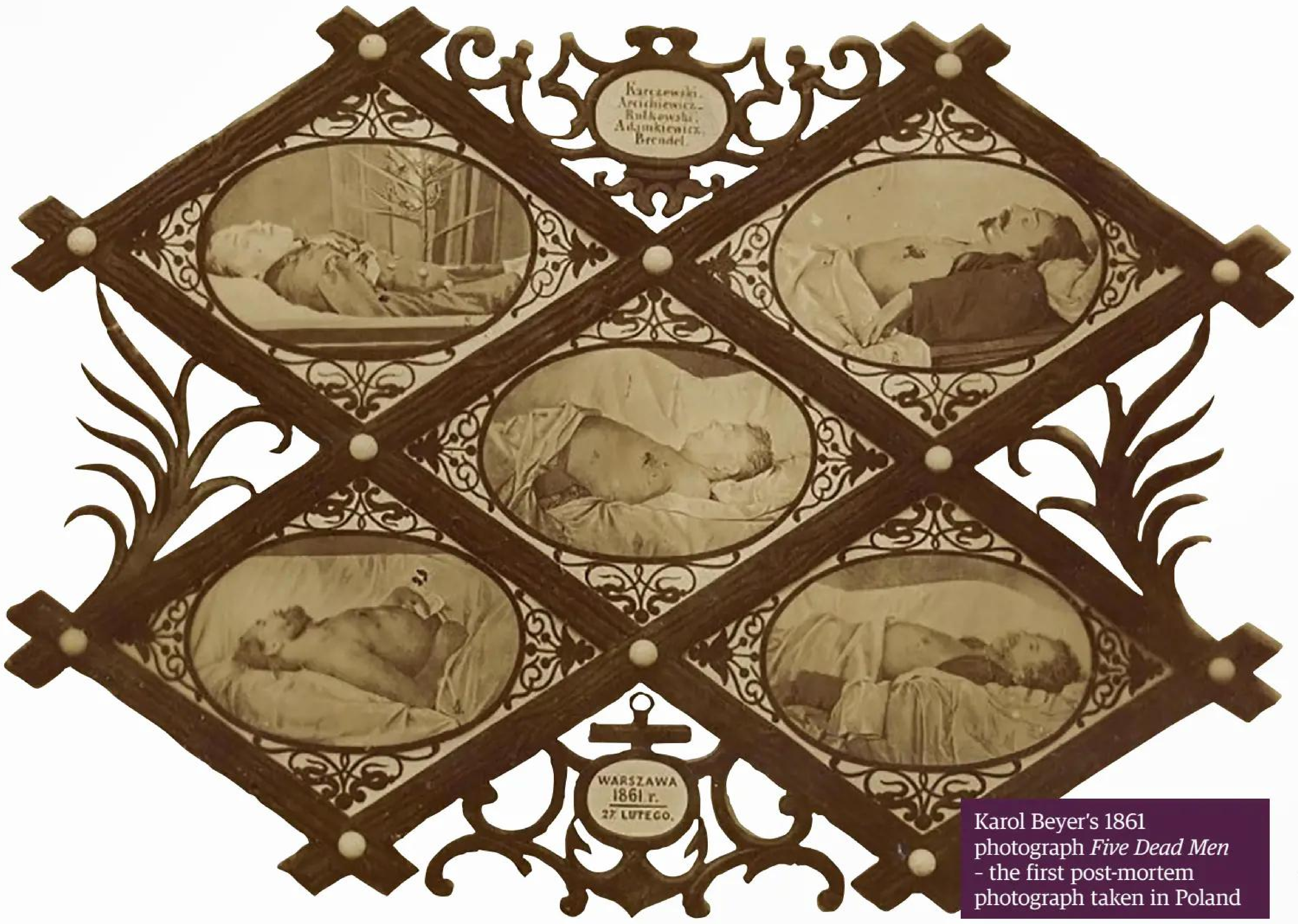
Imagesource: wiki/ dustimite; private collection

"Photographers were more likely to record deaths over weddings by some three to one"

As post-mortem photography became a regular and common practice, it's said that photographers invented new and unique ways in which to pose their 'models'. While stories abound of 'posing stands' used to prop up the dead, research suggests that these were in fact a common occurrence for living models during the period because exposure times were a lot longer. While the best possible care has been taken in selecting the images here, in some cases it is impossible to tell the authenticity of a post-mortem photograph.

Perhaps the most bizarre method of keeping models still was used on both the living and the dead. Given the long exposure times, taking images of young children was almost impossible due to an infant's tendency to cry, wriggle and spoil the process in every possible way. Thus an ingenious role was invented, that of the 'hidden mother'. The baby's actual mother would be disguised as either cushions or a backdrop and hold the infant. Others were far more obvious, such as using techniques to photographically remove the head of the mother. A sepia-toned image depicting a human-shaped bundle of rags holding a small child can be somewhat creepy, even more so when it's possible not every child photographed is alive. Although it's impossible to prove, a small number of examples show infants with what appears to be sunken eyes and possible stitching on their mouth. Naturally, this hidden mother method would both help to pose the dead body and also help to further give the illusion of life due to the sheer number of hidden mother photographs already in circulation.

In Poland the trend for death photography was particularly prevalent, and it was the work of Karol Beyer that garnered the most attention. Here, however, post-mortem photography took on a distinctly political role, curiously helping to unify the nation against a greater enemy. In the 1860s Polish anti-tsarist sentiment had begun to grow and would lead to the so-called 'January Uprising' that would begin in 1863 and last until mid-1864. Prior to this event, a protest against the tsar took place in Warsaw in 1861, and on 25 February, as a misguided and viscous means of quelling discontent, the army was given orders to shoot five of the participants. Beyer rushed to photograph the bodies and



Karol Beyer's 1861 photograph *Five Dead Men* - the first post-mortem photograph taken in Poland

arranged them in a distinct tableaux, distributing cards of the work across Poland. The result was an incredibly distinctive image that helped create a record of the actions of the Russian military but far more importantly helped unify and consolidate national sentiment against the tsar and in favour of this growing national movement against Russia.

As this suggests, in some cases these photos weren't even of loved ones and were sold en masse. Victor Hugo, the author of Les Miserables and The Hunchback of Notre Dame, was one of the celebrities who had photos of his body printed on cards and sold to enthusiastic punters. But Hugo wasn't alone in being immortalised in such a manner and is in illustrious company, including fellow novelist Marcel Proust and painter Gustave Dore. The former was a particularly late example, taken in 1922. Certainly not part of the Victorian trend, this photograph was taken by famed French photographic artist 'Man Ray', whose expertise was usually in creating abstract photographs. Through exposing objects to light and using the negative image he created what were called 'Photograms' or 'Rayographs'. The photo of Proust was an altogether different matter and taken at the urging of Ray's friend Jean Cocteau. Commentating on the photo of Proust, Cocteau stated: "Those who have seen this profile of calm, of order, of plenitude, will never forget the spectacle of an unbelievable recording device come to a stop, becoming an art object: a masterpiece of repose next to a heap of notebooks where our friend's genius continues to live on like the wristwatch of a dead soldier."

From a contemporary perspective, one of the most shocking things about post-mortem photography is how many depict children. Throughout the 19th century, the infant mortality rate was distressingly high. As Patricia Jalland points out in her book Death In The Victorian Family, in 1840 the number of deaths per 1,000 births was an average of 154, 148 in 1860, 153 in 1880, and 154 in 1900. This totalled some 100,000 infants dying every year before reaching their first birthday, the causes often being bronchitis, diarrhoea, pneumonia and a variety of other diseases. As Sarah Seaton, author of Childhood & Death In Victorian England, notes: 'To a 21st century person there are lots of visual mementos (if one is lucky) of a passed loved one. In the Victorian period, photography was still relatively new, complicated and expensive, so photographs, particularly of children, were not often taken. However, it is easy to understand why photographs were taken of deceased loved ones, whether alone or with other family members, as it may be the family's one and only chance to gain a memento of their precious child." Perhaps as a result of this, the children were often photographed either with their parents or as part of a family line up, their position dictated by their age. With younger children in particular, some sources state the eyes were painted onto the eyelids in order to better give the appearance of life.

While it's incredibly easy for a modern audience to look at the photographs shown here and shrink away in disgust or morbid horror, it is important to remember the context within which they were taken. As the Industrial Revolution turned London into an overpopulated metropolis without proper sanitary facilities, cholera outbreaks were a frequent occurrence, firstly in 1831. This was soon followed by outbreaks of influenza in 1837 and typhoid in 1838. Indeed, the Victorian period is full of epidemics that ravaged the population, including the 1889-90 flu epidemic, the recurrence of which would lead to the death of Queen Victoria's grandson Albert Victor. In fact, Victoria herself is a symbol of the nation's attitude towards death, choosing to wear black mourning attire after her husband Prince Albert's passing in 1861 until her own death in 1901. In the Victorian period, death was an everyday fact and people chose not to shy away or hide from it. Post-mortem photography should not be remembered as some horrific 'fad' but as a means for mourning families to obtain a precious memento of a lost loved one.

Such images were a precious keepsake for grieving relatives

The Mourner's Handbook

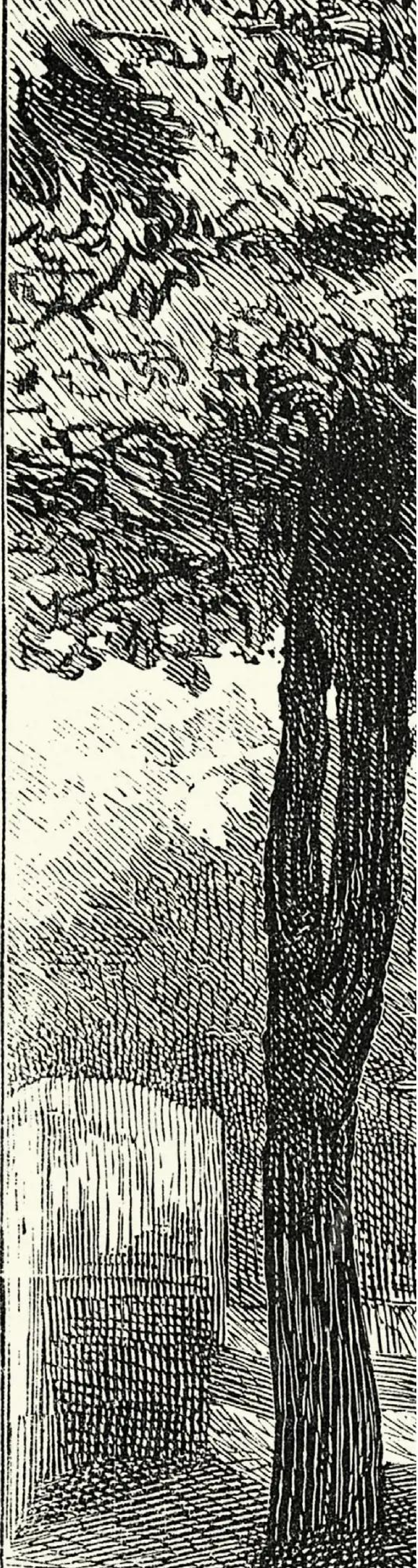
Written by Alice Pattillo

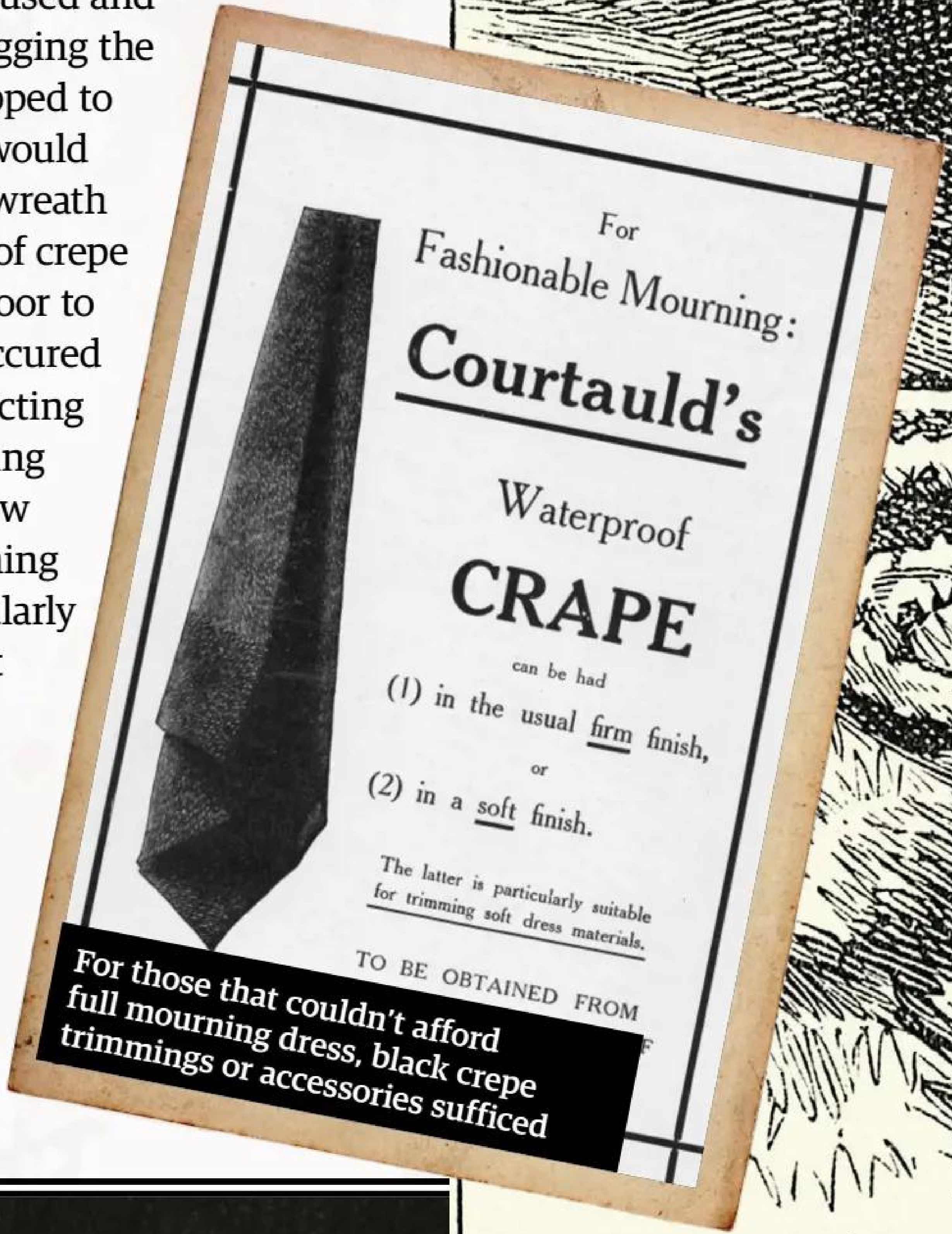
Whether you lost a loved one or merely an associate, Victorian society imposed strict guidelines on grief etiquette

It's no secret that the Victorians were obsessed with death. From death photography and memento mori to seances and gothic novels, the macabre was dead fashionable – in fact, many of the popular fashions were directly dictated by death. In 1861, Queen Victoria plummeted into a very public display of grief when her husband, Prince Albert, passed away after battling a two-year-long illness. Victoria would continue this mourning period for 40 years, until her death. While mourning was observed prior to the death of Prince Albert, when the Queen dramatically embraced a strict devotion to it following her loss the public followed suit, sparking a whole new level of mourning fashions, rituals and funeral customs that would spread throughout the Western world and inspire rigid etiquette that changed the way in which everyday people grieved the loss of their loved ones.

Liturgies of loss

During the mourning period, which could last anywhere from three months to three years or more, both your behaviour and appearance was dictated by a strict set of rules. Mourning commenced upon the day of death and was determined depending on your relationship to the deceased, your age and your gender. The house would be dressed for mourning by covering all mirrors and reflective surfaces with black cloth. Mirrors were seen as portals to the otherworld, so by covering them, Victorians believed they were preventing the spirit from getting confused and lost or appearing within them and dragging the living into death. Clocks would be stopped to honour the time of death and photos would be turned down or to face the wall. A wreath adorned with black ribbons or a piece of crepe fabric would be hung upon the front door to let passersby know that a death had occured within the household. There are conflicting opinions on what the stages of mourning were and for how long you would follow them, but for the upper classes, mourning was fairly heavily regimented – particularly for women – and you risked significant social shame if you didn't conform. Social standing and physical wealth could affect the time for which people mourned and the fashions of which they adhered to, for practicality's sake. Someone of lower social standing might find it difficult to acquire enough black fabric to wear





For Fashionable Mourning:

Courtauld's

Waterproof

CRAPE

can be had

(1) in the usual firm finish,

or

(2) in a soft finish.

The latter is particularly suitable for trimming soft dress materials.

TO BE OBTAINED FROM

For those that couldn't afford full mourning dress, black crepe trimmings or accessories sufficed

© Getty; Alamy

mourning clothing for the full dictated term, or to purchase a whole new wardrobe of mourning wear at all and had to dye existing garments as black as possible. However, black dye could stain skin and contained poisonous chemicals that could prove toxic to the wearer and, practically, black garments couldn't be bleached for cleanliness - something lower social classes, who often performed manual tasks, would find particularly difficult. On the other hand, more affluent people could afford to be much more elaborate in their expression of mourning and continue both the fashions and behaviours for much longer than required - such as Victoria herself, whose extended period of mourning earned her the nickname the 'Widow of Windsor'.

Forlorn fashion

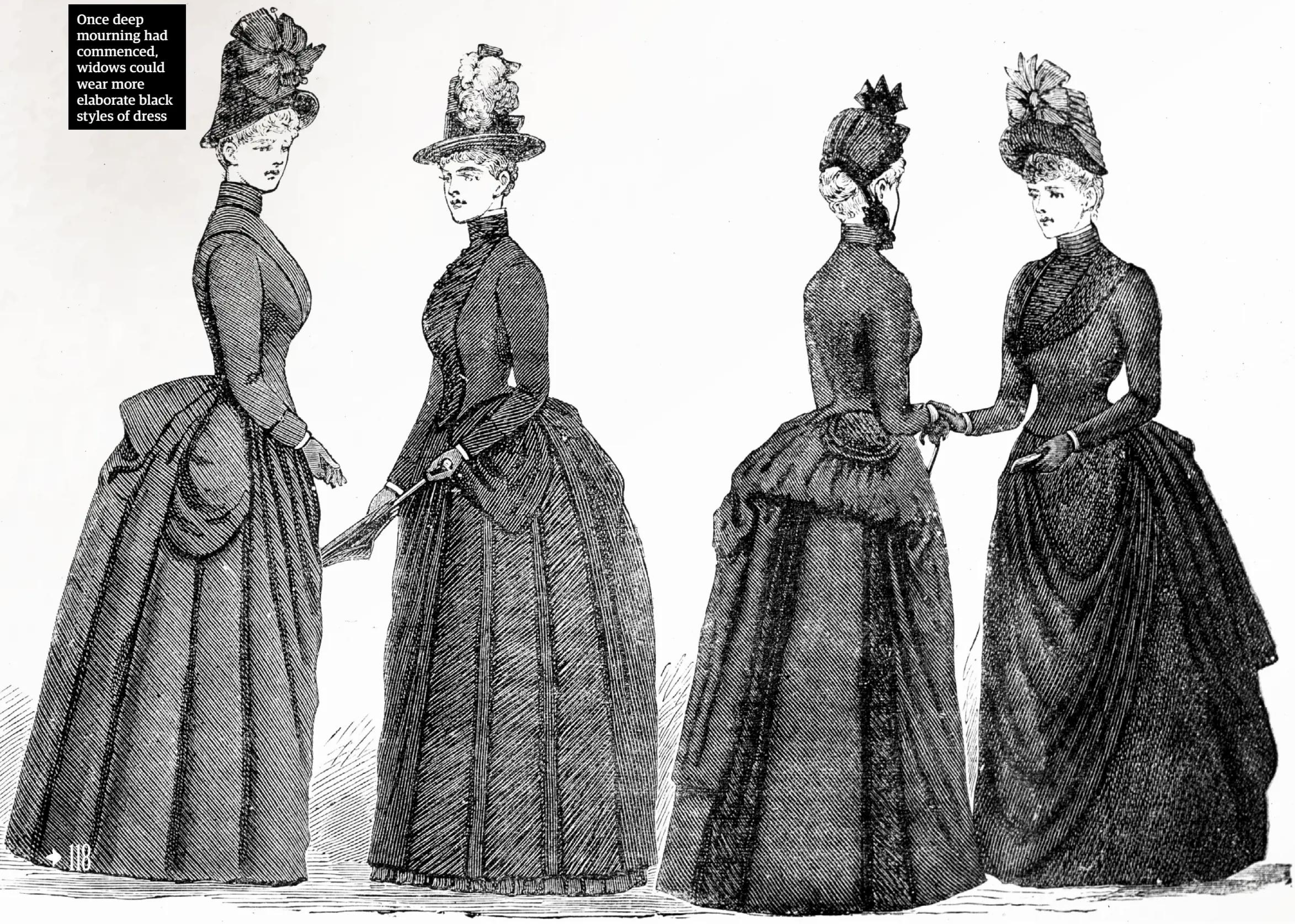
The most prominent way to display your grief was through your clothing - an outward display of inner grief - and pure black was indisputably the colour of mourning.

For widows, mourning was particularly strict. When in deep mourning, which would last for three years from the day of her husband's death, a widow had to don what were known as 'widow's weeds' - this consisted of a matte black dress and a weeping veil whenever they left their home. At home, it was customary for a widow to swap out their extravagant, heavy shroud for a cap, and once deep mourning had concluded, widows would enter secondary mourning and half-mourning when they could wear a far more practical black bonnet, don dresses made of silk or velvet and trimmed with white, grey, purple or mauve. It was not appropriate to wear fabric with a sheen while in deep mourning, so silks and fancy formal frocks were out, and crepe was favoured, although many widow's weeds were fashioned from heavy wool. The goal was to pick the perfect black – not too rusty or blue - as "true black" as possible. While in deep mourning, accessories were kept minimal; after these three years widows could introduce more elaborate mourning jewellery. The most popular choice of mourning jewellery was fashioned from jet. Jet was deemed the ideal material for mourning ornaments even prior to Prince Albert's death, but its popularity boomed thanks to Victoria's perchant towards the semi-precious fossilised wood with a dull lustre that shines when polished. Beads, earrings, bracelets, cigarette cases, penholders, cufflinks, hat pins, lockets and more were cut into dark mementoes of mourning. Dull jet accessories were the perfect finishing touch to any widow's weeds, with polished, shiny jewels a more impressive adornment for the later stages of grief.

Stages of mourning

There were generally two or three stages of mourning observed: Deep (or full) mourning, secondary mourning, and half-mourning, but sometimes half-mourning was skipped altogether. Mourning manuals were published so that the public could ensure they were following the up-to-date mourning trends and avoid any uneccessary social embarassments.

The first stage of mourning was referred to as full or deep mourning, and was the immediate period from when a loved one died, with the strictest rules to follow. Mourners were encouraged to retreat from society as much as possible and not attend anything remotely pleasurable, such as gatherings or functions, or socialise with anyone except close relatives until this designated period was up - which lasted at the very least, three months. The only exception to this was church attendance. Widows were to avoid balls and



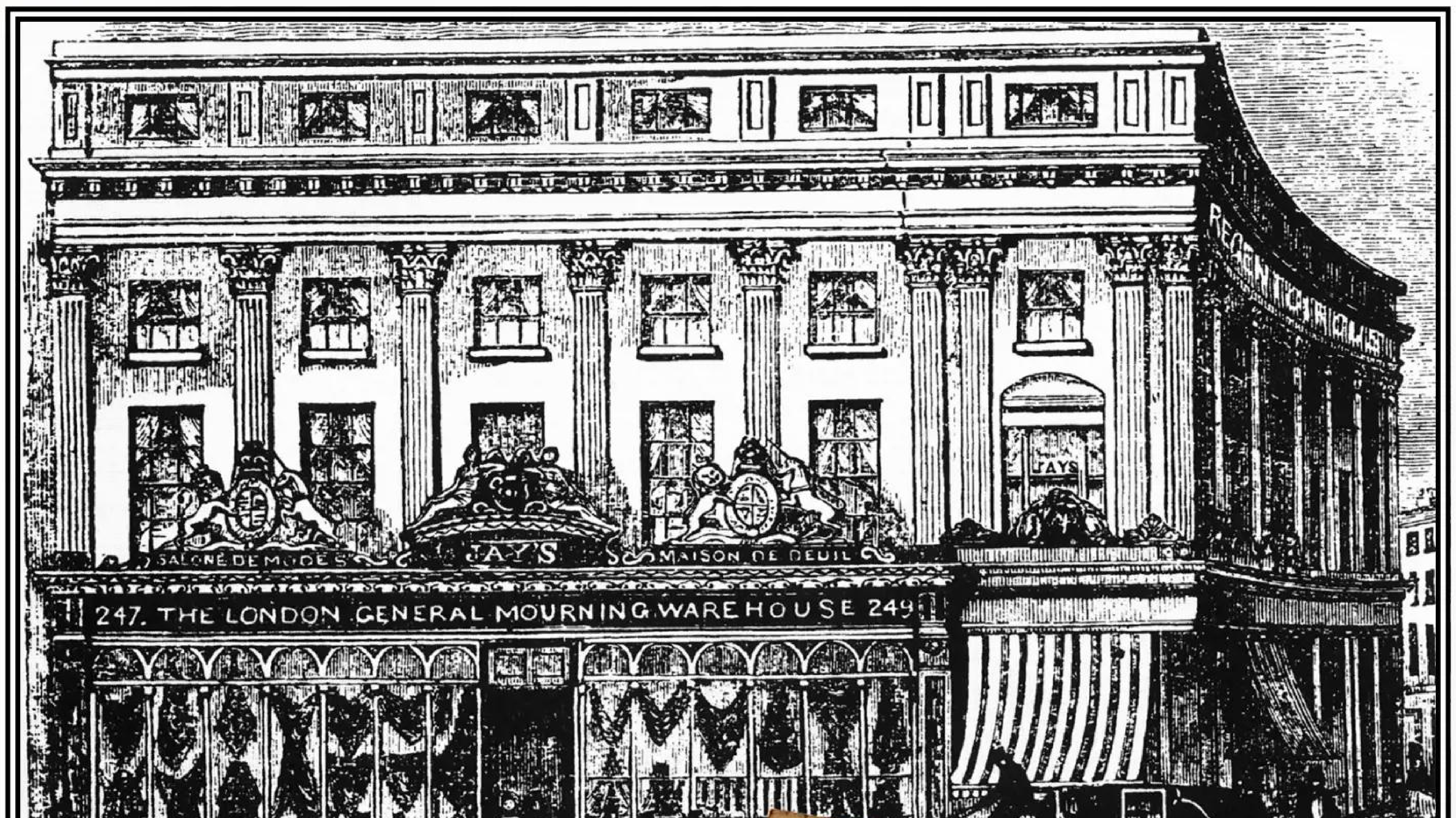
Once deep mourning had commenced, widows could wear more elaborate black styles of dress dances for a full year. To keep a widow occupied during this period of isolation, she may participate in crafting wreaths and sentimental jewellery out of her dead loved one's hair, an activity that proved immensely popular and gave women the opportunity to grieve outside of the public eye while immortalising the memory of the deceased.

The second and third (half-mourning) stages of mourning allowed mourners to re-enter society and tone down their dress code from all-black to choice colours. When deciding to re-enter society, mourners should notify their friends with cards that indicate they are leaving their period of grief and available once more.

Victorian widows had by far the longest period of mourning, whereby they would limit social interaction, adhere to a strict dress code and eventually heal and return to society. Widows would enter deep mourning for 18 months to two years, and shield themselves from society. Full mourning garb, including a heavy veil, should be worn for a year and a day from the date of their husband's passing, or longer, and crepe should cover their dress or be used as a trim. Secondary mourning lasted nine to 12 additional months following full/deep mourning and a black bonnet or cap could replace their veil and more elaborate textiles such as velvet and silk could be introduced. White, purple and grey could be worn, as trims or as accessories, as could diamonds and, after a year in mourning, gold. Half-mourning was the final stage, lasting around three months. Coloured clothing could be introduced with black accents, as well as additional accessories.

Typical mourning for widowers was one year. They could remarry at any time during the mourning process but typically would observe deep mourning, where they would don a black suit and hat, for three months. If he remarried within a year, the widower's new wife would have to go into mourning too.

Parents who lost their children and children who lost their parents would mourn for a year – ten or eight months of full mourning and two or four of half-mourning. White trim could be added to clothing after three months along with diamond jewellery. For parents grieving very young children, mourning was shortened by half as infant deaths were common. Children over 12 would wear mourning, but those under 12 were allowed to wear their regular clothing with accessories in either grey (spring and summer) or black (autumn and winter).


SALONE DE MODES
JAY'S
MAISON DE DEUIL
247. THE LONDON GENERAL MOURNING WAREHOUSE 249

Mourning fashion was so popular that there were entire department stores devoted to it

Some of Queen Victoria's mourning jewellery, including a mourning cross brooch commemorating the death of her daughter Alice

Dead man's parties

Funerals became an elaborate expression of wealth and competitive exhibits of the dead's esteem

Funeral customs changed during the Victorian era as well as personal mourning rituals. The bigger the funeral, the more the family was said to honour the deceased, but this could be a huge financial burden for those left behind. The bereaved would send out fancy invitations, similar to a modern wedding. Mourning biscuits were given out to guests along with biblical verses and poems that would honor the deceased. Floral arrangements became customary, developing out of the tradition of displaying embalmed corpses at home prior to the funeral. These embalming techniques used arsenic, which didn't prevent decomposition and the stench of rotting flesh, so scented flowers were used to disguise the smell. The Victorians also developed an entire language associated with flowers and semi-precious stones to introduce further meaning into the mourning rituals. Victorians would also, rather dramatically, use tear vials (or lacrymatories) at funerals. These small vials would capture the tears of mourners present at the funeral and were given to the family of the deceased. They also helped the family decide how long to mourn – once all the tears dried up, mourning could cease.

The displays didn't stop there. In some circumstances the bereaved went as far as employing what were essentially theatrical performances. Professional mute mourners were employed to attend a funeral. These men, or male children, would stand outside the house in mourning and join the funeral procession dressed all in black and holding a draped staff with a woeful expression and the ability to cry on cue. Contrastingly, in Ireland, keeners (wailers) were popular. These women – either a friend, relative or hired professional – would dramatically cry at a wake and follow the deceased's coffin to the grave expressing the emotional turmoil of the grief-striken.

Victorian funerals were an elaborate affair

© Getty; Alamy

VICTORIAN OCCULT

Lifting the shroud on the 19th century's obsession with death and the afterlife

Written by Callum McKelvie

On 1 April 1848, ten-year-old Catherine Fox and her sister Margaret, 14, received a mysterious visitor at their home in New York - a ghost. The spirit, which went by the name Mr Splitfoot (a popular name for the devil at the time), communicated with the girls through a series of 'rappings' - tapping out messages on a hard surface. It was able to discern their ages and answer questions they put to it. Later, the phantom claimed to be the ghost of peddler Charles B Rosna who, five years earlier, had been murdered and buried in the cellar.

As a result of these strange events, the girls and their supposed powers caught the public's attention. They first visited Rochester and demonstrated their 'rapping' for a paying audience, later making regular appearances in New York City. Having performed for such personalities as historian George Bancroft and novelist James Fenimore Cooper, the girls became a popular entertainment act and news of their otherworldly abilities spread to Great Britain. Of course, no one took any notice that the day the Fox sisters first 'communed' with Mr Splitfoot also happened to be April Fool's Day.

"The Fox sisters created the first craze for spiritualism," says Simone Natale, author of *Supernatural Entertainments: Victorian Spiritualism And The Rise Of Mass Media Culture*. "What I find interesting is that the emergence of spiritualism is considered to begin in the small town of Huddersfield in the state of New York, where they first reported experiencing this phenomena. However, really their demonstration in Rochester should be considered the beginning. This was the first time spiritualism was presented as a sensation to a paying public. The Fox sisters also had managers and people who handled their relationship with the press, so there was an element of show business."

Soon other mediums appeared, demonstrating their abilities in return for money. In the US and Europe, a spiritualism craze began as mesmerism, mediumship and magic fuelled the public imagination, seemingly in contradiction to the simultaneous growth in rational and scientific thought. The Victorian relationship with the supernatural is an interesting one in the supposed age of scientific reasoning,

Illustration by: Joe Cummings
Details: © Getty Images

EBENEZER SCRO

An 1840s illustration for Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*

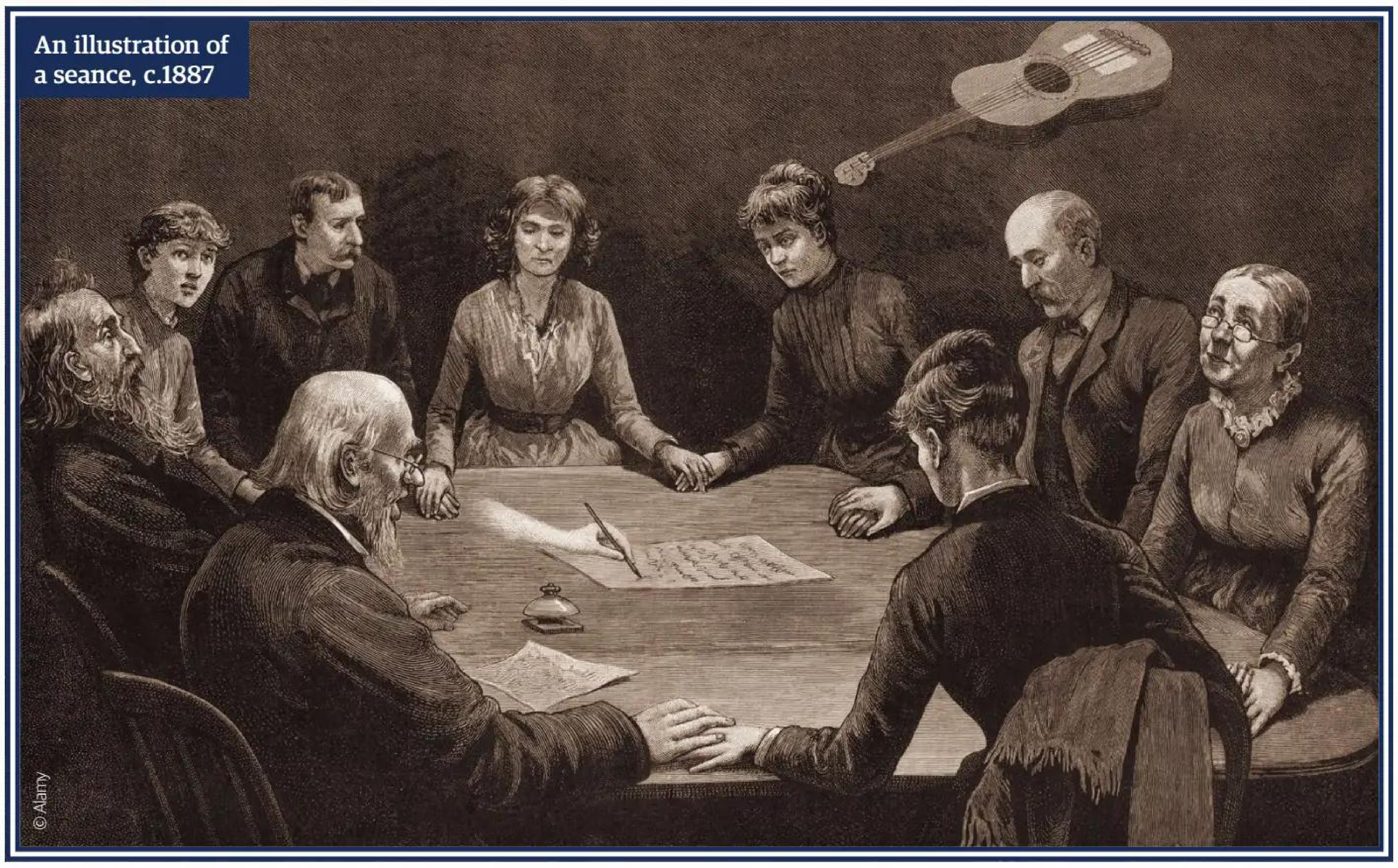
the era of Darwin and the century of Chambers. Yet the Victorian obsession with death and any possibility of life afterwards cannot be denied. Due to the Fox sisters' hoax, a bizarre mix of sensationalist sideshowery and serious scientific investigation began and lasted until the end of the century and into the next, in the United States, Britain and most of Europe.

One of the initial starting points for spiritualism's spread into the United Kingdom was a visit by the medium Maria B Hayden. Setting sail with her husband in October of 1852, their arrival was met with some controversy and there were many who disputed their claims. Despite this, the Haydens attracted the attention of numerous upper class personalities, including Charles Young (described as the leading tragedian actor of his time), Sir Charles Isham and royal physician Dr John Ashburner. They publicly expressed their amazement at Maria Hayden's supernatural abilities, with Young in particular struggling to understand how she was aware of facts whose details he had revealed to no one. Charging a guinea for her services, her husband also launched a publication on the topic of mediums and spiritualism entitled *The Spirit World* (that only lasted one issue). Whether sceptics or believers, there was no denying people's interest in Hayden and soon table tapping developed into an incredibly popular pastime.

However, not all proved as successful as Hayden. Throughout the century there were scandals involving many popular mediums that exposed their various 'tricks of the trade' and ended their careers. Perhaps one of the most notorious of these swindlers was Daniel Donglas Home, who was involved in several scandals. During a seance in 1855 a particularly embarrassing scene occurred when he presented an apparition to the poet Robert Browning and proclaimed it to be the latter's son who had died in infancy. The apparition was unveiled to be Home's bare foot, made all the more awkward because Browning had had no such child.

Browning's encounters and subsequent anger with Home would later inspire his poem *Mr Sludge – 'The Medium'*, which opens with the line: "Now don't, Sir! Don't expose me!" Surprisingly this seems to have been a favourite trick of Home's as barrister Frederick Merrifield also claimed to have witnessed the use of the phantom foot, as well as a fake arm attached to Home's own. Frank Herme and Charles Williams were two other nefarious tricksters who came unstuck. In 1875 the duo were caught out when the latter acted the part of a spirit by clothing himself in two yards of 'stiffened muslin, wound round his head and hanging down as far as his thigh'.

> "One of the most notorious spirit-scandals avoided mediumship entirely and relied on the use of a relatively new piece of technology – the camera"



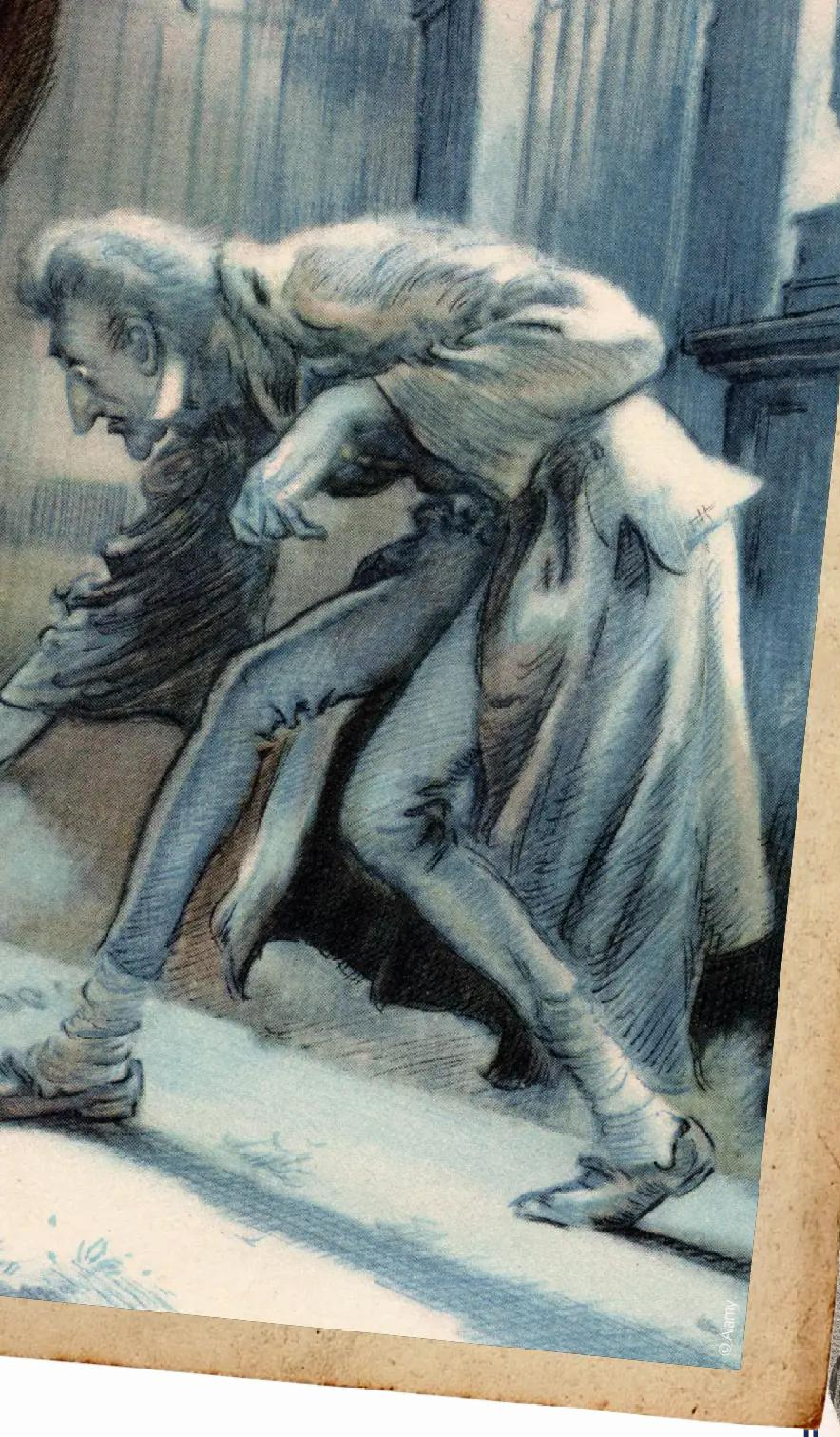
An illustration of a seance, c.1887

© Alamy

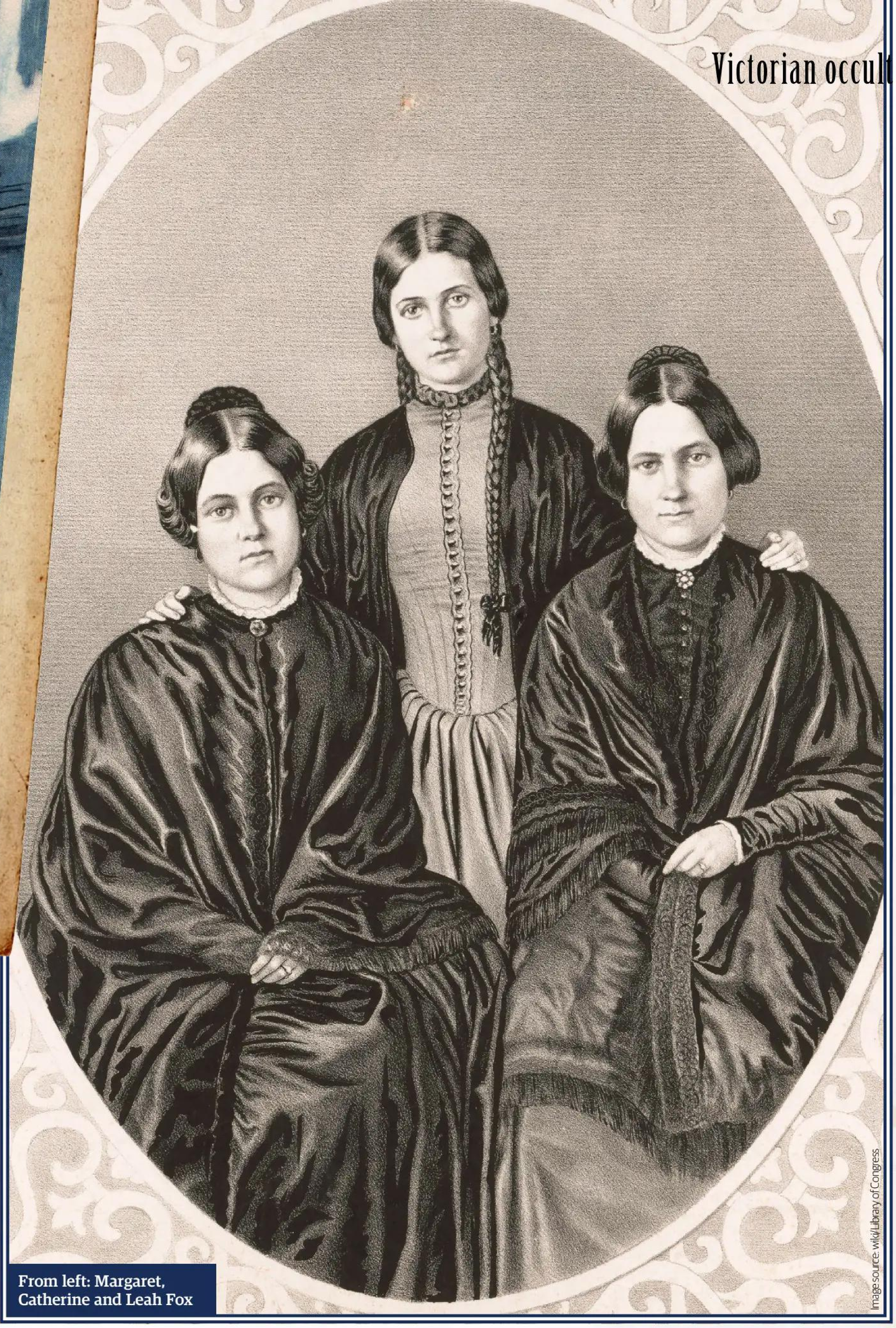
One of the most notorious spirit-scandals, however, avoided mediumship entirely and relied on the use of a relatively new piece of technology – the camera. At some point during the 1860s a young American photographer, William Mumler, was developing one of his pictures and was startled to see the visage of his dead cousin in the image. Discovering a knack for photographing spirits of the dead, the enterprising Mumler was able to turn this into a business opportunity and soon had many clients, including Abraham Lincoln's widow Mary Todd Lincoln.

As Mumler's business grew it became increasingly reliant on grieving families whose loved ones had perished in the Civil War. This brought with it a certain amount of fame and notoriety, as Mumler found himself with a long list of enemies committed to exposing him as a fraud.

One of his most vociferous opponents was PT Barnum, the American entrepreneur and businessman portrayed by Hugh Jackman in 2017's *The Greatest Showman*. Barnum took particular dislike to Mumler's exploits and claimed, among other allegations, that the photographer had broken into homes in order to obtain pre-existing photographs of clients' loved ones. Mumler was eventually placed on trial for fraud and Barnum testified against him. In one particularly damning piece of evidence, Barnum hired Abraham Bogaerdus to replicate Mumler's effect and create a photograph that showed Barnum with the ghost of Abraham Lincoln. This, along with the



© Alamy



From left: Margaret, Catherine and Leah Fox

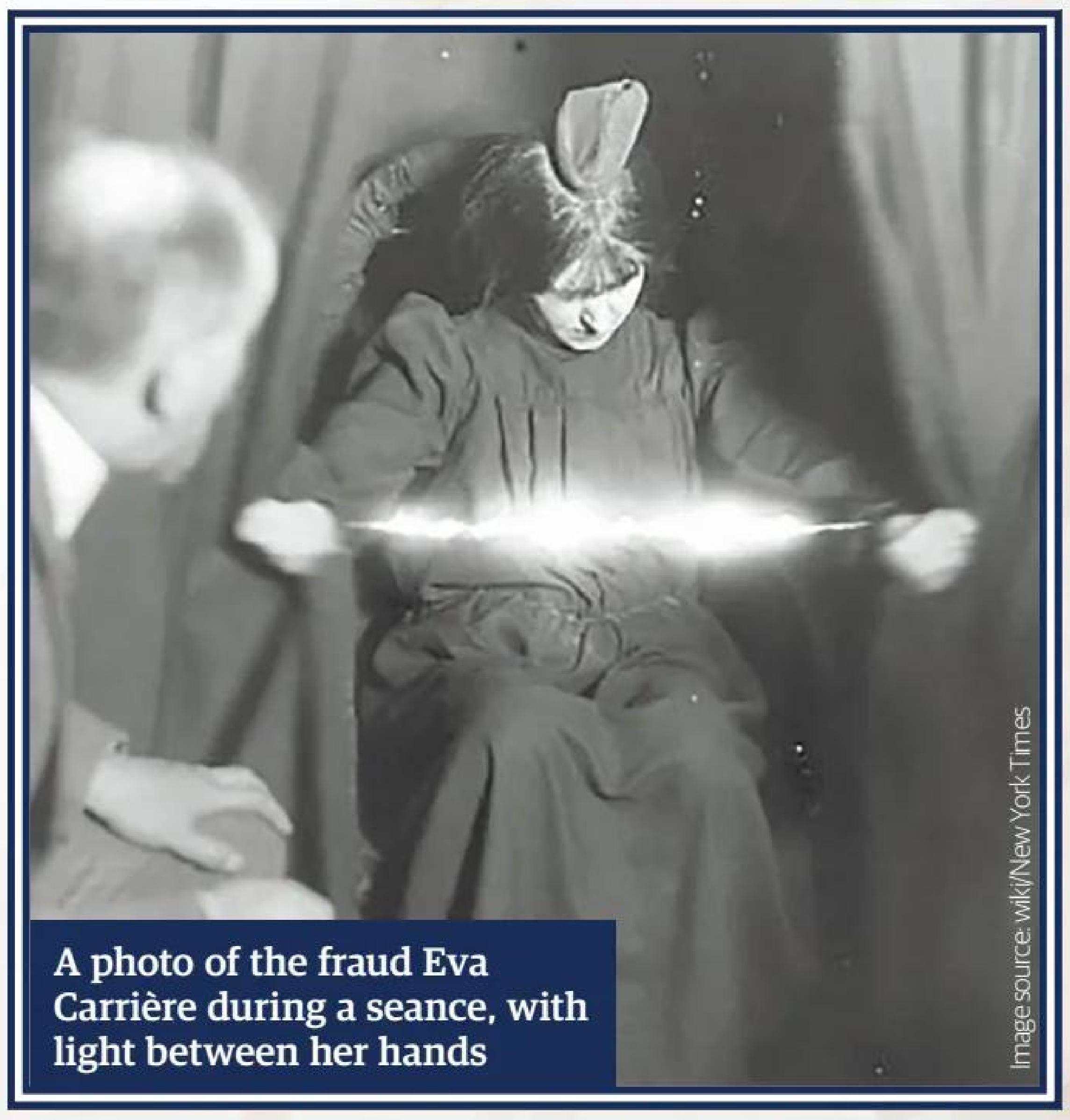
Image source: wiki/Library of Congress

gradual realisation that the numerous 'spirits' photographed by Mumler were actually still among the living, left his reputation in tatters. Despite being acquitted and resuming his career as a portrait photographer, he never again dabbled in the spirit world. However, Mumler had not been alone in his use of 'spirit' photography, nor did belief in the possibility die out following his trial. It remained a popular exploit throughout the century and today a variety of examples can be found in museums across the world.

"The relationship between spiritualism and evidence is a very important element," says Natale. "One of the things that happens with spirit photography is that it provides a form of evidence. Around the same time that spirit photographers were producing their works, there was a lot of doubt within the spiritualist movement that these could be trusted. In fact, there were attempts to get testimonies from people who witnessed spirit photographs being developed. However, in my opinion, the key thing was that photography was part of an emerging visual culture that started in the 1860s. At this time there were the first developments of photography as a mass medium. They were printed, circulated and used as a visual curiosity, a form of entertainment, and the same thing happened with spirit photography. It also presented a material object that was visually compelling and prints were sold by spiritualist publishers or presented in lectures alongside the magic lantern."

Elsewhere in the United States, another spiritual renaissance was occurring. These days New Orleans has a reputation as one of the USA's paranormal hot spots and much of this reputation rests on the city's connection to voodoo. 'Louisiana Voodoo' is a form of spiritualism based on the traditional Haitian religion and began in the mid 1700s, flourishing during the 19th century. In this period, no practitioner was more powerful than Marie Laveau, one of 15 'Voodoo Queens'.

Born around 1801 to the former slave Marguerite Henry D'Arcantel and Charles Laveaux, much of her life is shrouded in mystery. Entering into a relationship with Christophe Glapion, a descendent of an aristocratic French family, they moved into a creole cottage and it was here around 1820 that Laveau began practitioning. She opened a beauty parlour aimed at some of the wealthier families in New Orleans, which not only provided her with the latest gossip but also with a place through



A photo of the fraud Eva Carrière during a seance, with light between her hands

Image source: wiki/New York Times

GHOST STORIES

Five mysterious hauntings and supernatural happenings that obsessed 19th century Britain

The Hammersmith Ghost

Towards the end of 1803, several people claimed to have been attacked by a malevolent spirit in the Hammersmith area of London. Believed to be a suicide victim whose soul could not rest as they hadn't been buried in consecrated ground, two female victims died from fright and a brewer's servant was attacked in a graveyard. As a result local men armed themselves and patrolled the streets, among them one Francis Smith. Smith came across bricklayer Thomas Milwood, who was entirely clad in white for his work. Panicking, Smith shot and killed Milwood. The resultant trial set important legal precedents regarding accountability and mistaken belief.

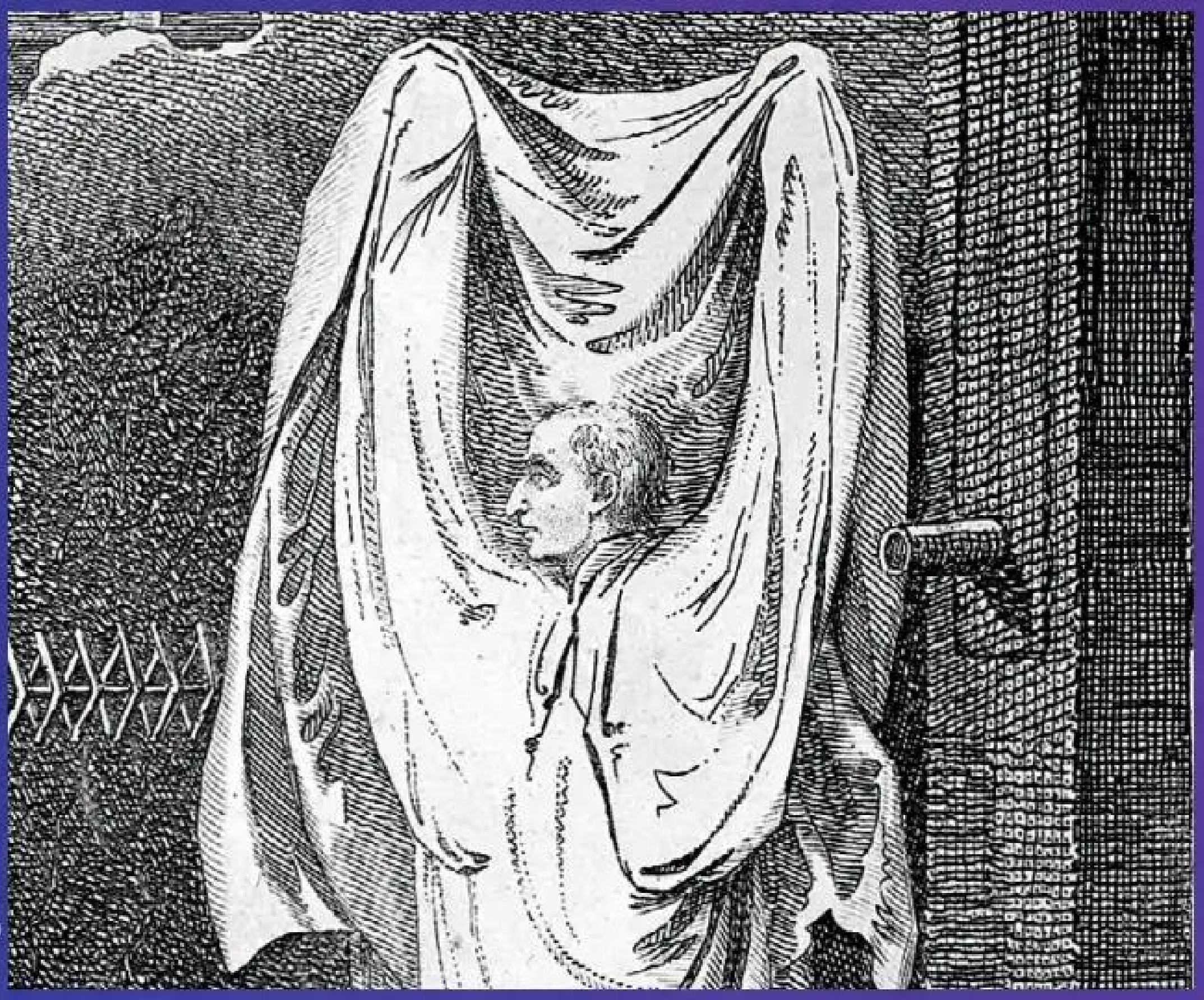


Image source: wiki/Welcome Collection

The Electric Horror Of Berkeley Square

A notorious hotspot for supernatural happenings during the latter half of the 19th century, many ghosts walked the halls of 50 Berkeley Square in central London. A particular room on the second floor caused more fear than most, however, and tales include a young maid found screaming, dying shortly afterwards, and Lord Thomas Lyttelton shooting at a mysterious creature in the night. In 1879 an issue of *Mayfair Magazine* reported that "the very party walls of the house, when touched, were found saturated with an electric horror".

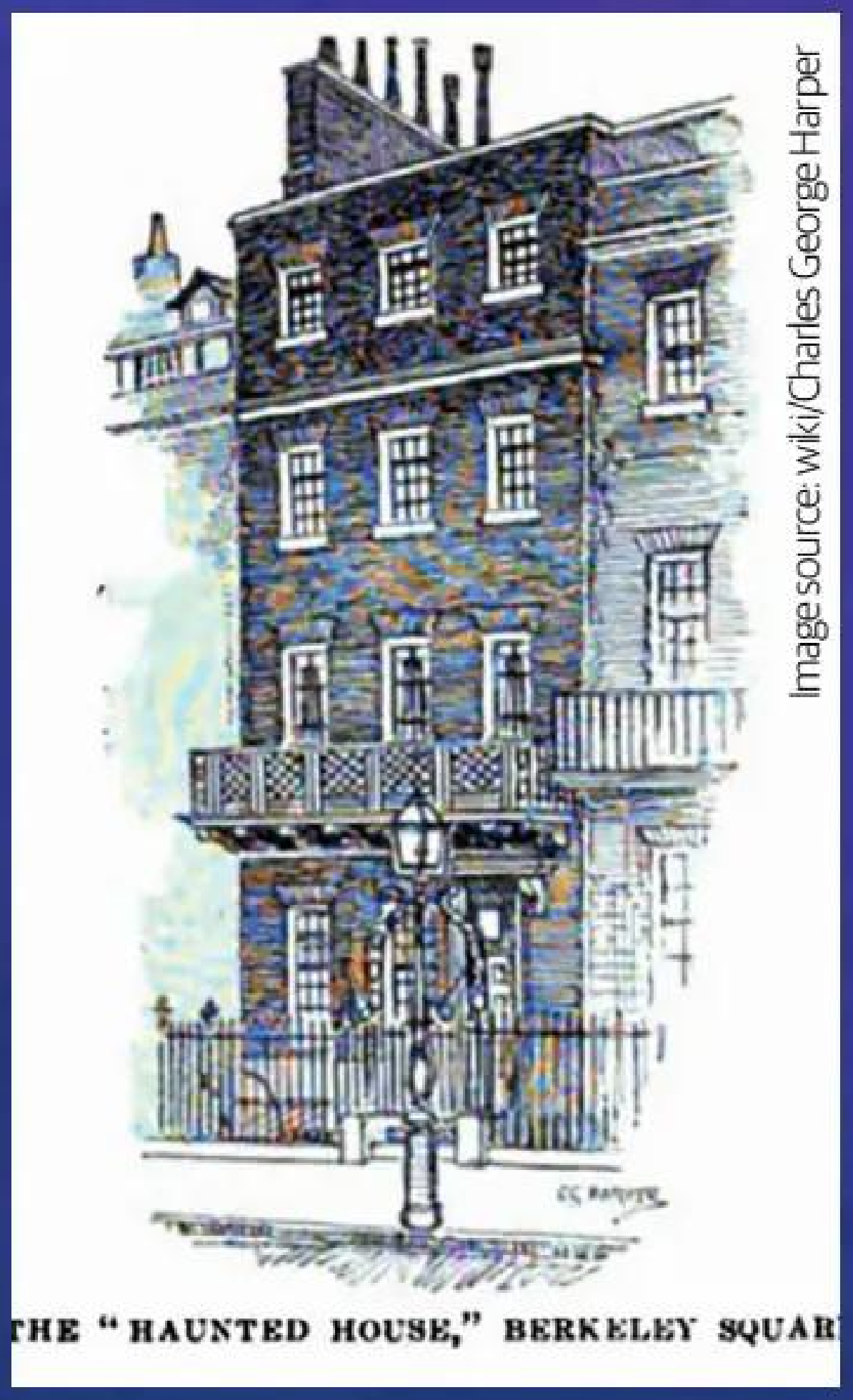

THE "HAUNTED HOUSE," BERKELEY SQUAR

Image source: wiki/Charles George Harper

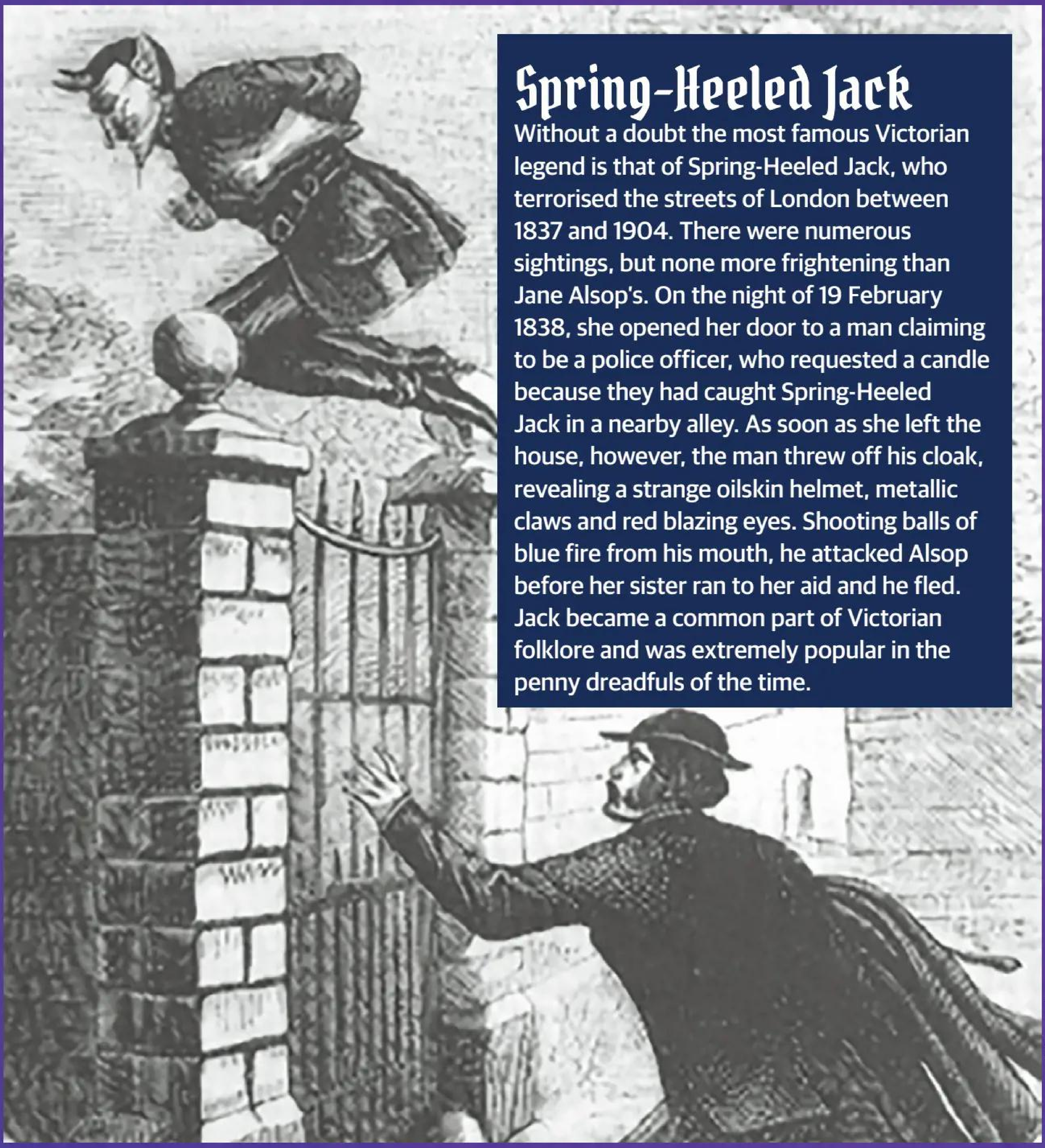


Image source: wiki/Anomaly

Spring-Heeled Jack

Without a doubt the most famous Victorian legend is that of Spring-Heeled Jack, who terrorised the streets of London between 1837 and 1904. There were numerous sightings, but none more frightening than Jane Alsop's. On the night of 19 February 1838, she opened her door to a man claiming to be a police officer, who requested a candle because they had caught Spring-Heeled Jack in a nearby alley. As soon as she left the house, however, the man threw off his cloak, revealing a strange oilskin helmet, metallic claws and red blazing eyes. Shooting balls of blue fire from his mouth, he attacked Alsop before her sister ran to her aid and he fled. Jack became a common part of Victorian folklore and was extremely popular in the penny dreadfuls of the time.

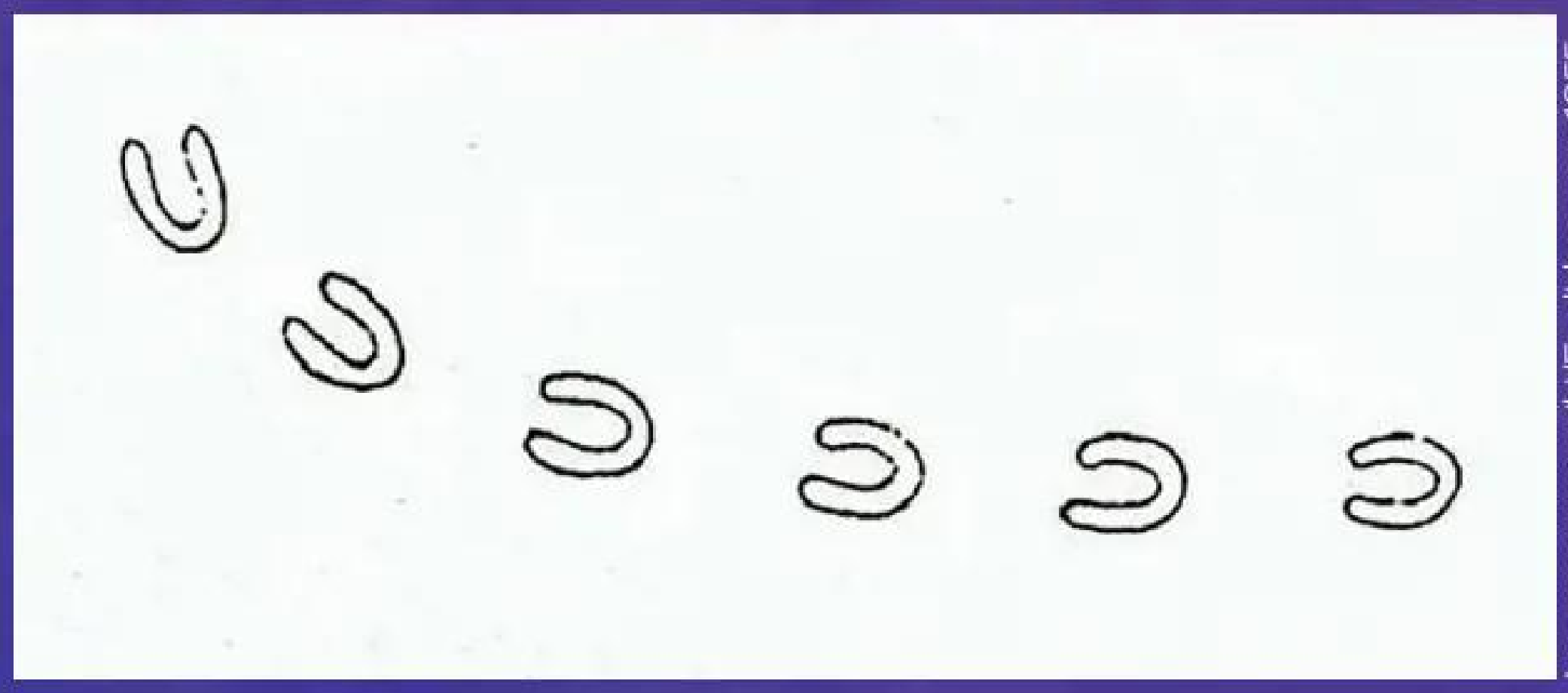


Image source: wiki/English papers 1855

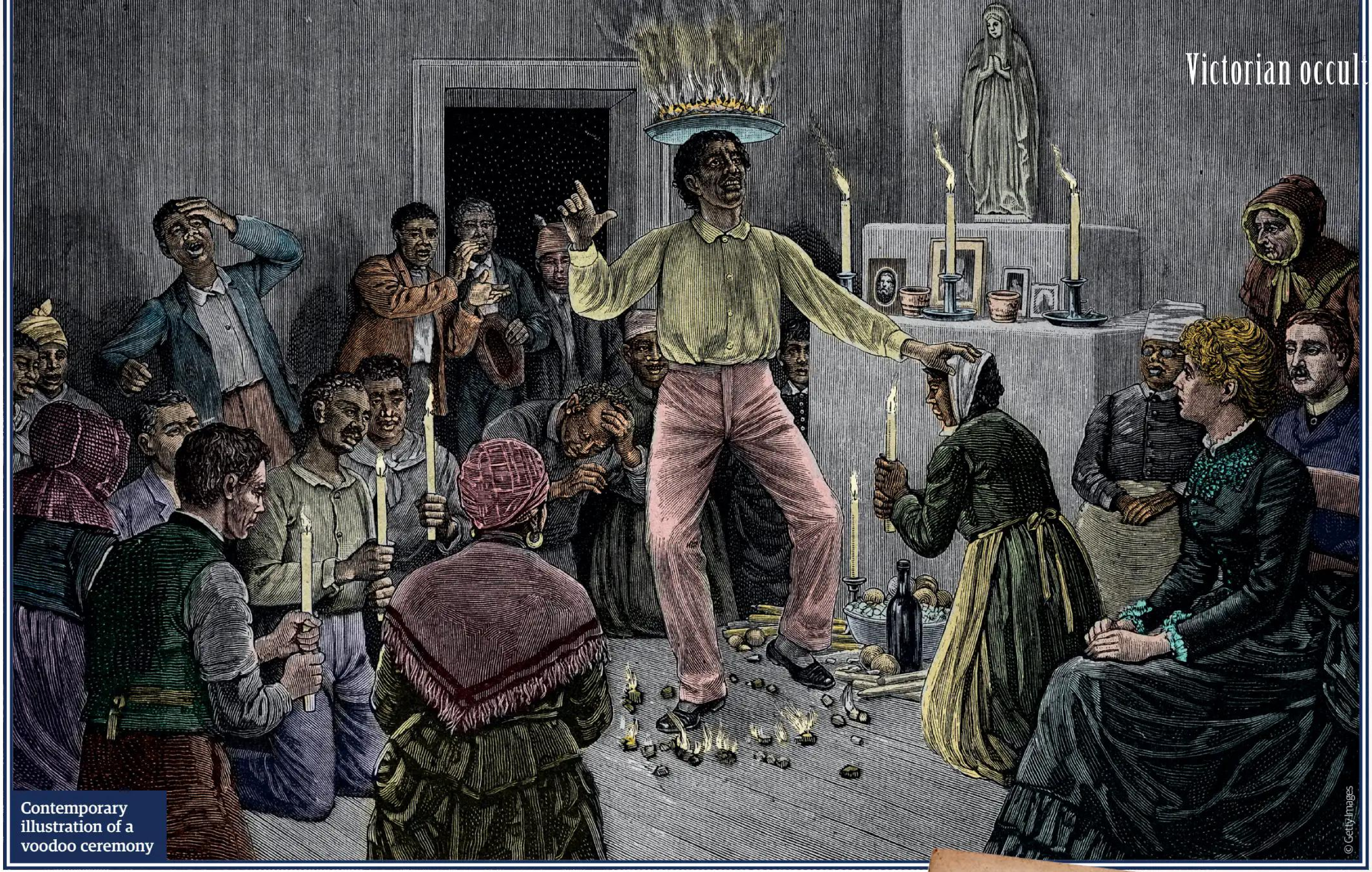
Devil's Footprints

In February of 1855, trails of strange hoof marks appeared overnight in the snow. Covering a distance of 40 to 100 miles, they appeared on the tops of houses, fields, gardens, and in places enclosed by high walls. Local parishioners feared the marks had been left by Old Nick himself and numerous explanations, including an escaped kangaroo, have been touted ever since.

The Grey Man Of The Theatre Royal

The Theatre Royal on Dury Lane in London plays host to many spectres, the most famous being the Grey Man, an 18th century nobleman. In the late 1870s legend has it that workmen uncovered a bricked-up skeleton with a sword protruding from its ribs. Could this have been the Grey Man himself?

© Getty Images



Contemporary illustration of a voodoo ceremony

© Getty Images

which to sell her charms and dolls. In the 1850s her fame as a Voodoo Queen led to several accounts of her activities in local newspapers, with one in particular noting: "Marie and her wenches were continuously disturbing the peace and that of the neighbourhood with their fighting and obscenity and infernal singing and yelling… [in] the hellish observance of the mysterious rites of Voudou… one of the worst forms of African paganism."

> "Mumler was developing one of his photos and was startled to see the visage of his dead cousin in the image"

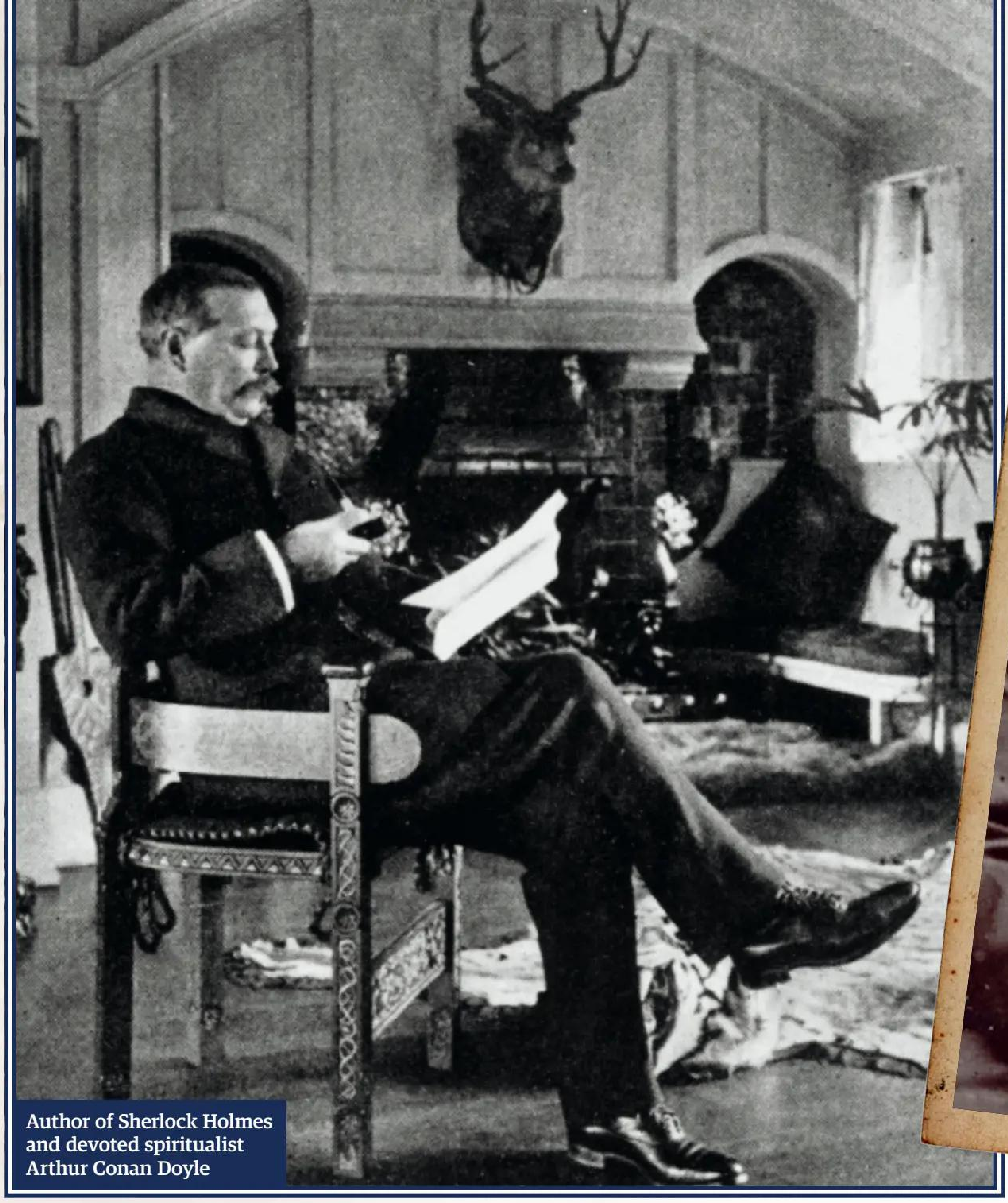
In 1874, she held a rite for St John's Eve on the shores of Lake Pontchartrain that attracted some 12,000 followers. Laveau's most integral contribution, however, was in furthering the introduction of elements of Roman Catholicism into traditional voodoo, a practice which had begun during the religion's initial import in the early 18th century.

Back in Great Britain, the spiritualist obsession was in full-swing. The Society For Psychical Research was founded in 1882 with the intention of investigating ("without prejudice or prepossession of any kind") various paranormal phenomena and acted as an extremely fierce proponent of the movement. Several decades earlier in 1862, The Ghost Club had been formed for much the same reason. Originally having its roots in discussions between fellows at Cambridge, it counted Arthur Conan Doyle and Charles Dickens among its members. Often incorrectly assumed to be a result of the death of Conan Doyle's son Kingsley in 1918, Conan Doyle's interest may well have been a lifelong obsession. In January 1880 he attended a lecture entitled *Does Death End All?* and wrote to his mother saying it was "very clever thing indeed," but ultimately that it was, "not convincing to me."

Thirteen years later, in 1893, his interest had developed enough to persuade him to join the Society For Psychical Research. His focus was always primarily towards the spiritual and the dead as opposed to areas such as mesmerism, although he was known to occasionally dabble in that too. However, more often than not his time with the society was taken up by experimenting with 'table tapping' and automatic writing. Conan Doyle's fascination with the spiritual would eventually caused it to surface in his stories. His short story *Playing With Fire*, for example, tells of a group of people

Mary Todd Lincoln in the photo that was said to show the ghost of Abraham Lincoln

Image source: wiki/Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne


Author of Sherlock Holmes and devoted spiritualist Arthur Conan Doyle

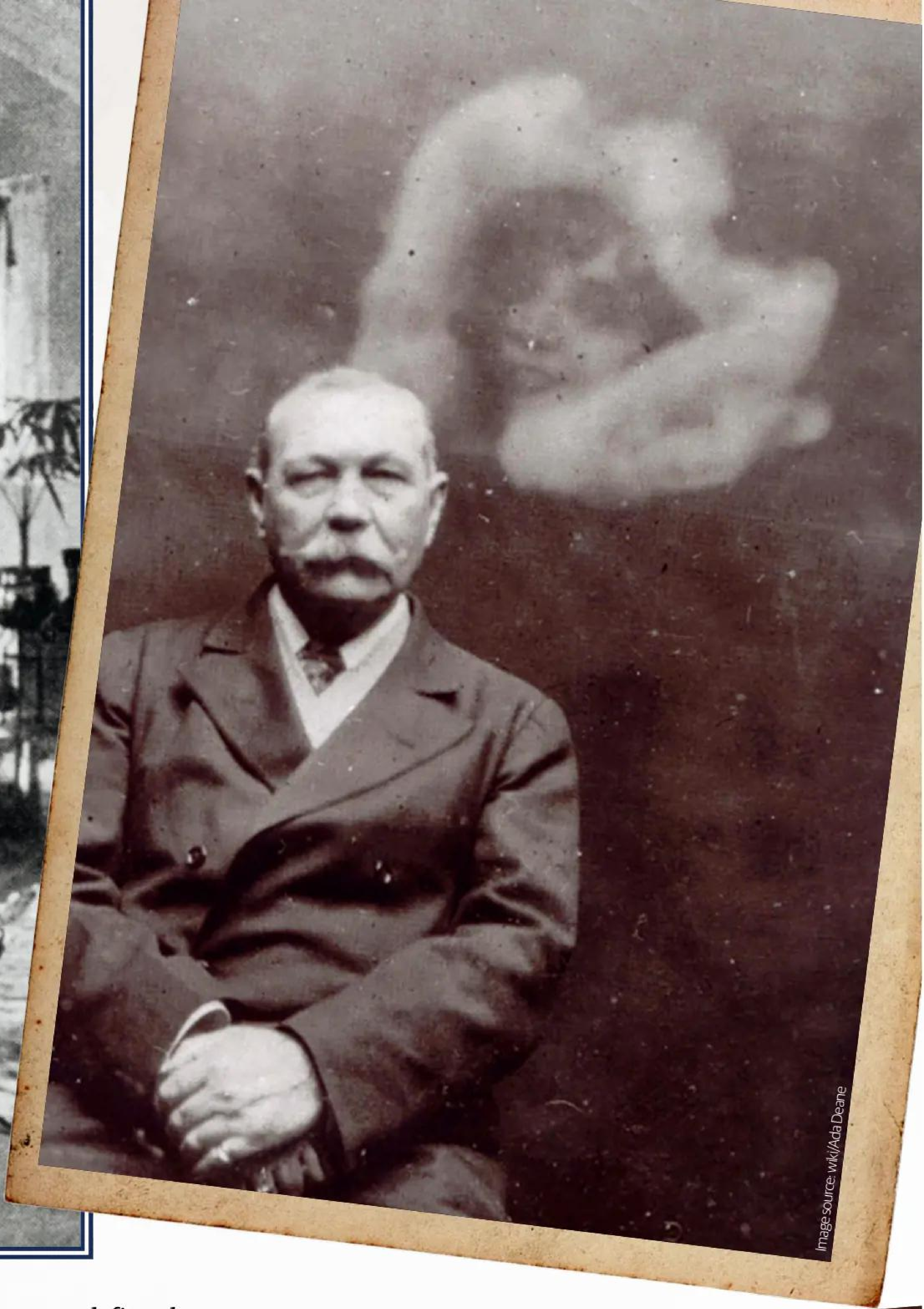


Image source: wiki/Ada Deane

struggling with the consequences of a seance. Perhaps the most striking example is one of his later novels, *The Land Of Mist* (1926), featuring the hero of *The Lost World*, the hot-tempered Professor Edward Challenger. The story deals directly with spiritualism, even to the extent of having its sceptical hero converted into a believer at the book's conclusion. Somewhat troublingly, the second section of *The Land Of Mist* suggests that the Central Intelligence (God) punished humanity for laughing at the possibility of an afterlife by instigating the slaughter of World War I.

Conan Doyle was by no means the only literary figure of this era to turn to the supernatural as inspiration for his stories. As the public interest in phantoms and spooks grew, it didn't confine itself simply to table tapping and soon seeped into popular culture as well. Penny dreadfuls (cheap, sensationalist novels), theatre productions and gothic melodramas all became obsessed with the spirit world.

More than any other medium however, the 19th and early 20th century was the golden age of the ghost story as writers such as MR James and Charles Dickens created some of the most bloodcurdling tales of terror the world had yet seen. Between them, these two authors would bring something new to the ghost story and help cement the form as a Christmas tradition. James had a yuletide habit of reading his tales to his students at Cambridge, while Dickens published *A Christmas Carol*, perhaps the most famous seasonal ghost tale of all. James's stories did not appear in print until 1904, but came to define the burgeoning ghost tale genre.

Arguably his most celebrated work is *Oh, Whistle And I'll Come To You, My Lad*, which tells the story of an academic's stay at an isolated seaside resort and the events that occur when he discovers a strange whistle on a beach. Often featuring as their protagonists fussy academics who find themselves facing off against supernatural forces, the stories can be seen as narrative battles between the growing reliance on scepticism and rational thought against more traditional superstitions.

James and Dickens were not alone, however, and other famous authors attempted to get in on the act. Robert Louis Stevenson's 1884 story *The Body Snatcher* draws on the Burke and Hare murders of 1828, in which the two had turned to homicide in order to procure fresh corpses for Dr Robert Knox and his medical students. Featuring a rather nasty supernatural twist in the tale, the story is a perfect example of the combination of the Victorian love for the grim and grisly with the paranormal. Towards the end of the century, even Oscar Wilde got in on the act with *The Canterville Ghost* (1887), an amusing pastiche in which the ghost is the one who is haunted.

Among numerous key figures within the spiritualist movement, one of the most interesting was newspaper editor WT Stead. To this day, Stead remains controversial for his article series such as *The Maiden Tribute Of Modern Babylon*, which created a state of moral panic and was instrumental in the creation of the Criminal Law

Image source: wiki/William Hope

Image source: wiki/Edouard Isidore Buguet

Amendment Act of 1885. As the articles dealt primarily with child prostitution, Stead used unlawful methods of investigative journalism to procure his information and spent three months in prison as a result. Through his radical journalistic style of involving his personal opinions he was able to influence contemporary society and politics.

In the 1890s Stead developed a strong interest in spiritualism and founded the quarterly journal *Borderland* in 1893. Running until 1897, the magazine was targeted towards the general public as opposed to members of the Society For Psychical Research or other individuals with a vested interest in the topic. Perhaps one of his most inventive decisions was to employ one Ada Goodrich Freer as his assistant editor, who wrote primarily under the pseudonym Miss X.

A medium, clairvoyant and psychical researcher, Freer was member of the Society For Psychical Research and became acquainted with John Crichton-Stuart, the Third Marquess of Bute, a devoted spiritualist who organised several investigations into the topic throughout his lifetime. One of the more famous involved Freer in an attempt to discover the causes of reputed hauntings at Ballechin House, a Georgian estate in Perthshire, Scotland, which had been owned by Major Robert Steuart in the mid-19th century. Steuart had returned to the house in the 1850s after serving in the Indian Army, during which time he'd developed a strong belief in reincarnation as well as a somewhat intense admiration for man's canine companions. On several occasions he was reputed to have said that after he died he would return in the form of a dog.

Following Steuart's death, his young nephew inherited Ballechin House and, obviously fearing the major's four-legged return, promptly executed the all dogs on the estate with a rifle. As a result of this the major, his spirit having been denied its furry body, began haunting the halls of Ballechin. Enter Freer, who stayed in the house between February and April of 1897. During her stay she would regularly read aloud from the *Office Of The Dead* (a prayer cycle for long-dead souls) and strange sounds were recorded. Her findings were then printed and published in *The Alleged Haunting of B-- House*, which stated it's intention as "not for the establishment of theories but for the record of fact". However, public interest in this investigation was highly critical and a June 1897 issue of *The Times* newspaper included a particularly harsh assessment of the events. In particular, Freer was targeted and, rather than standing by one of their own, the Society For Psychical Research quickly disowned the clairvoyant and discredited all findings of the investigation. Freer's relationship with the society never fully recovered and she fled first to Jerusalem and then America before fading into obscurity.

As the decades wore on, interest in the spiritual and supernatural never really went away. It would be easy to assume that the public fascination in

> "As the public interest in phantoms and spooks grew, penny dreadfuls, theatre productions and gothic melodramas all became obsessed with the spirit world"

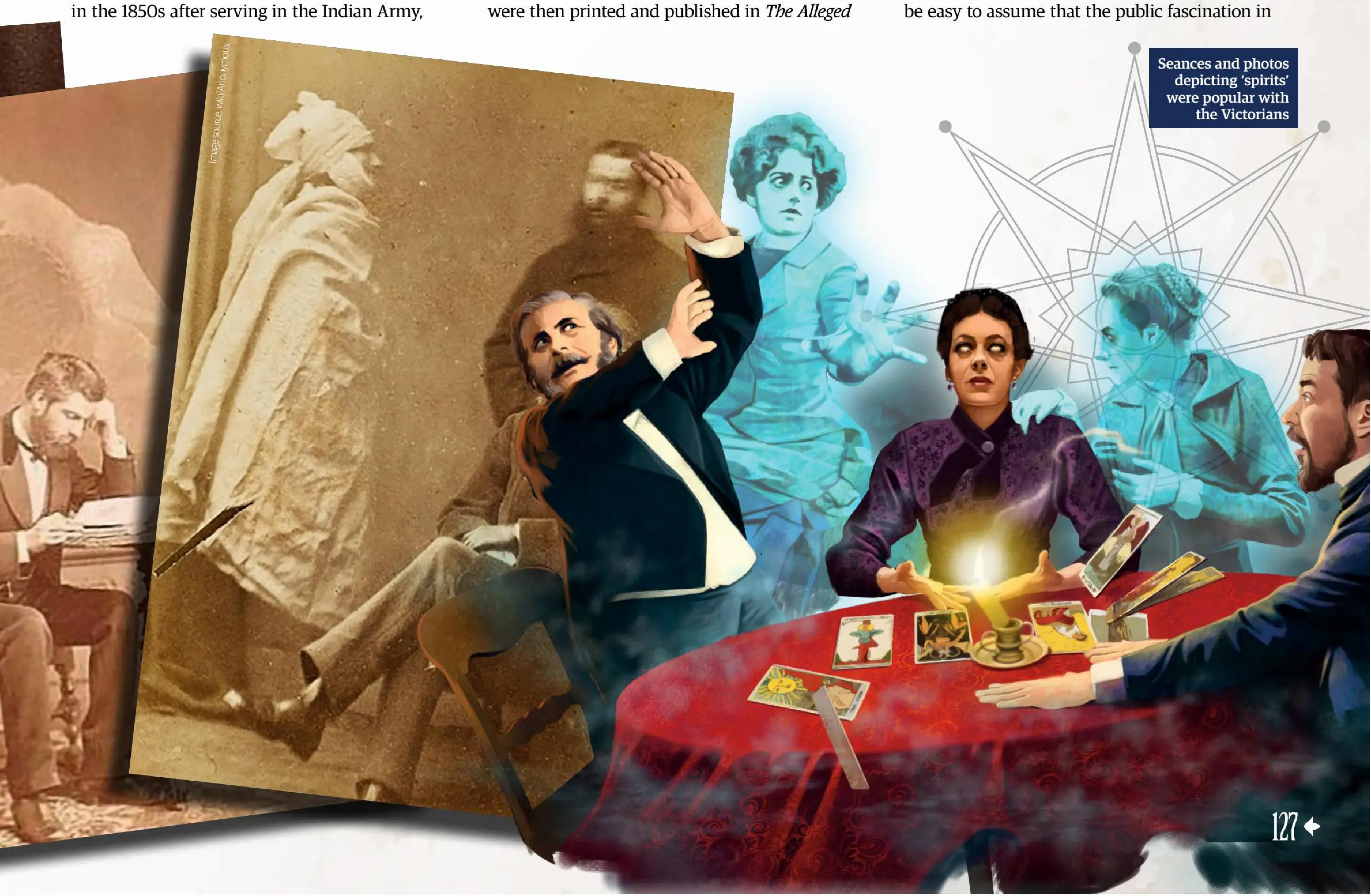
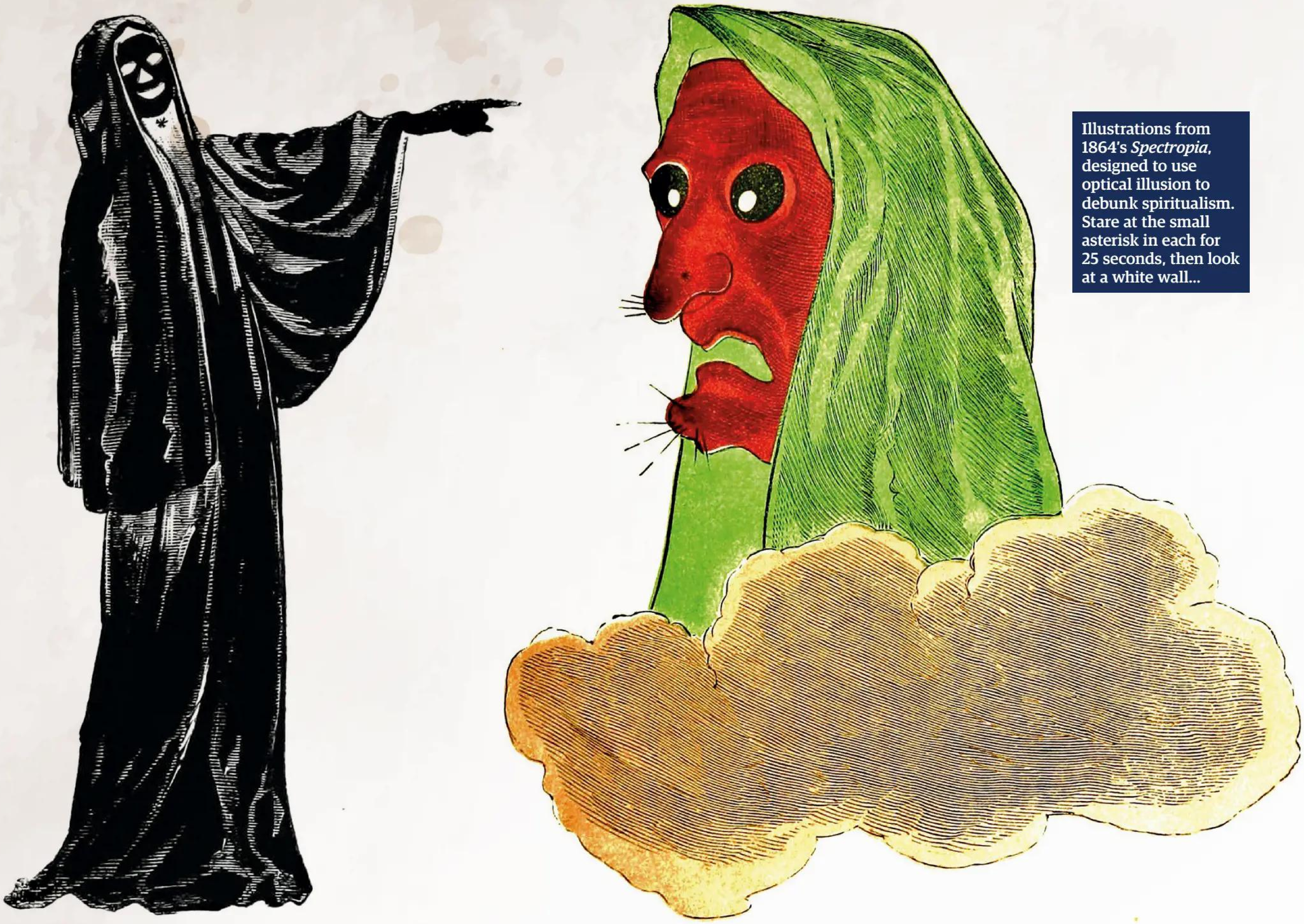


Image source: wiki/Anonymous

Seances and photos depicting 'spirits' were popular with the Victorians



Illustrations from 1864's *Spectropia*, designed to use optical illusion to debunk spiritualism. Stare at the small asterisk in each for 25 seconds, then look at a white wall…

Images source: wiki/ Archive

spiritualism and the occult faded due to World War I as the mechanised horror of that conflict caused people to doubt their beliefs, but that would not be true. If anything, while popular interest began to wane in the years prior to the war, the conflict caused another boom in interest as people sought to commune with those they had lost. Physicist Oliver Lodge, who had long been a member of The Ghost Club, published *Raymond* in 1916, which told of his communication with his son Raymond, who had been killed at Ypres in 1915. The book was incredibly popular and inspired others to attempt to commune with loved ones they'd lost during the war.

Even over successive decades, interest in the spiritual and supernatural never quite went away. In the 1920s and 1930s, interest in occult philosophy overtook more spiritualist leanings and the works of Dennis Wheatley and Aleister Crowley captured the public imagination. Since then, interest in the supernatural has remained strong. The next boom occurred during the 1960s and fed into the 1970s as the Age of Aquarius's darker side saw the rise of Anton LeVay's counterculture group the Church of Satan and an obsession with all things dark and devilish.

"Spiritualism and the supernatural presents an age far away from ours, the Victorian age," says Natale. "You certainly see a decline in popular spiritualism since the beginning of the 20th century but this doesn't mean there was a decline in belief. Mysticism became more and more important in the 20th century and, of course, we had the New Age movement. So these beliefs don't fade away but they develop. We still have a lot of TV programmes where we can see supernatural events presented for an audience, for example *Most Haunted*, which uses the conventions of a documentary to explore haunted houses but from the perspective that it might be true. There is an underlying fascination with the supernatural and with spirits that was popularised in the 19th century."

The 19th century and the supernatural are closely linked within the public consciousness. Gothic horror films continue to use the Victorian manor house and the smog-filled streets of London for inspiration. Authors still evoke the atmosphere and style of writers such as MR James, with Susan Hill's 1983 novel *The Woman In Black* being a particularly strong example of the modern Victorian ghost story. And, of course, *A Christmas Carol* remains a popular yuletide fixture. Just like the spirits that so obsessed them, the Victorians' fascination with the spiritual continues to haunt us.

> "Just like the spirits that so obsessed them, the Victorians' fascination with the spiritual continues to haunt us"

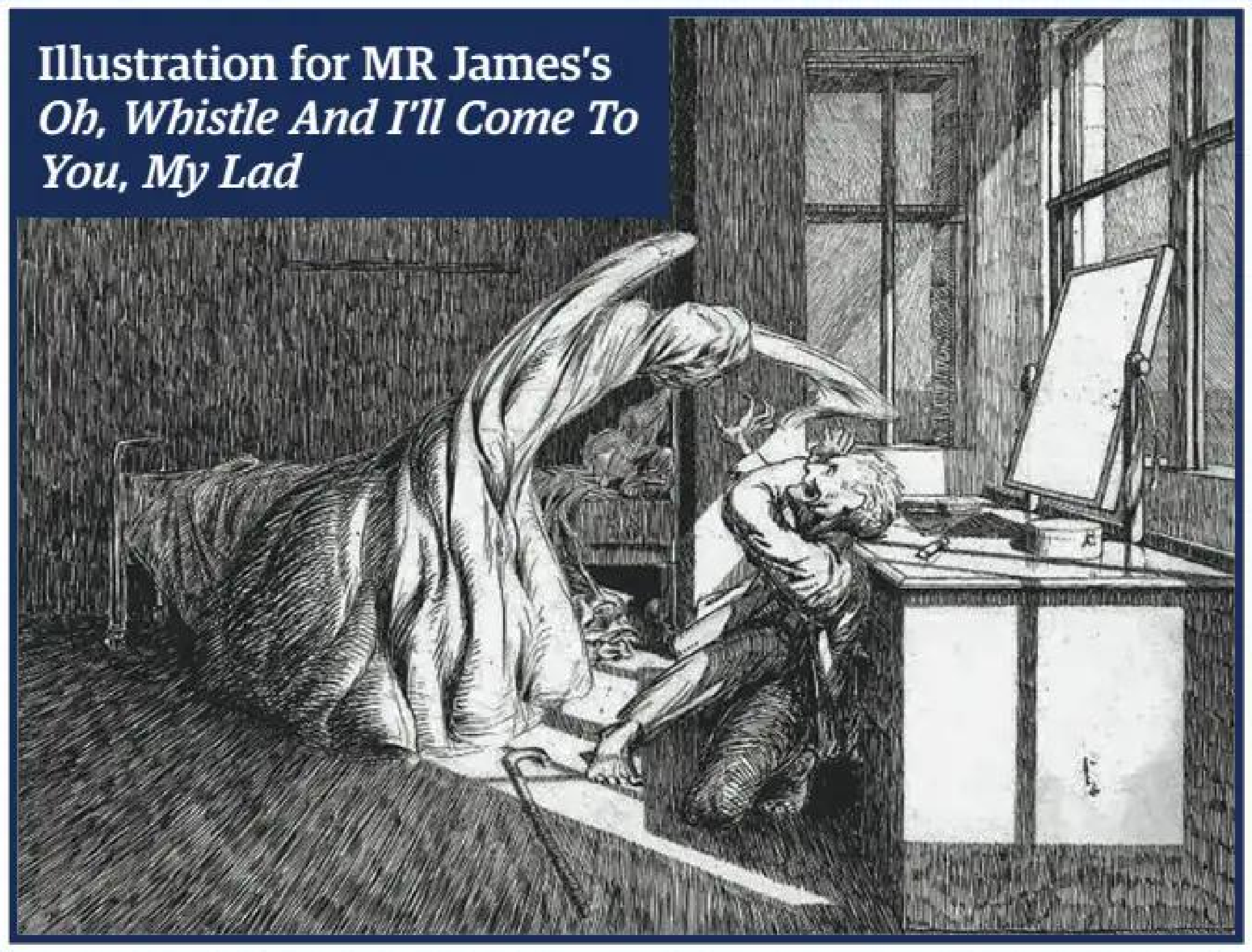


Illustration for MR James's *Oh, Whistle And I'll Come To You, My Lad*

Image source: wiki/James McByrde

PARANORMAL INVESTIGATORS

We talk to Alan Murdie, chairman of Britain's oldest ghost hunting society, The Ghost Club

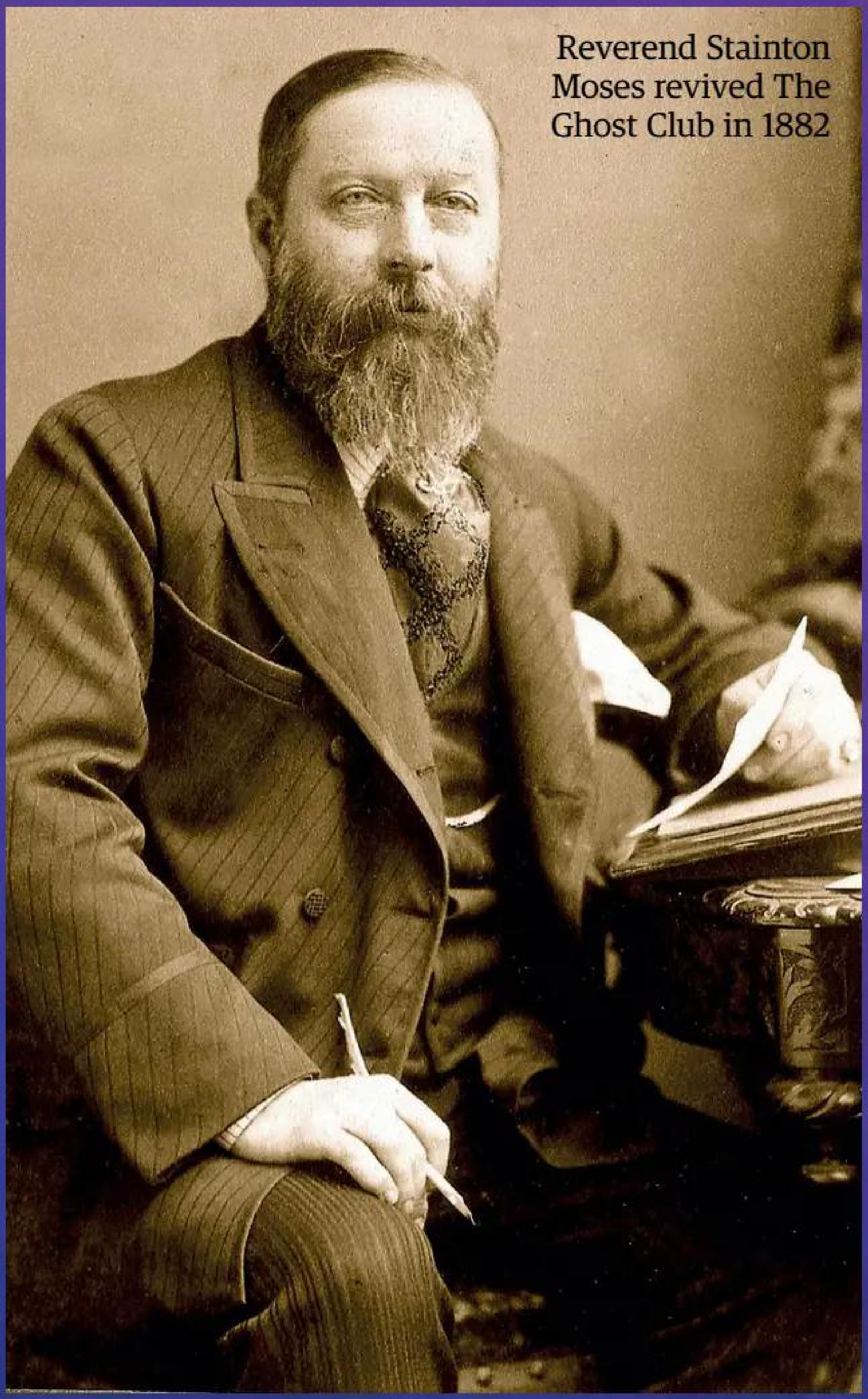
What exactly is The Ghost Club and what is its mission?

The Ghost Club is essentially a private body of friends and members who are particularly interested in ghosts and the paranormal. It's a place where sceptics and believers can meet on common ground. We don't have any collective opinion, but provide a forum and meeting place where people who are interested in the subject can debate and discuss on a social basis. We also conduct our own investigations and research from time to time, looking into both the scientific and the cultural sides of ghosts and the paranormal more wildly. We primarily investigate accounts in Great Britain but we're also interested in reports of phenomena abroad. I like to think we preserve and celebrate some of our cultural traditions and history of ghosts.

The Ghost Club was founded in the 1850s

Can you tell us a little about the organisation's history?

The Ghost Club's origins go back to the 1850s, to a very loose student society, which was formed at Trinity College in Cambridge. It was then launched officially in London in 1862 (with an announcement in *The Times*) and it seems to have carried on in this manner until the early 1870s, when it ceased meeting. In 1882 it was revived by Reverend Stainton Moses, a forgotten 19th century figure who combined life as a Church Of England clergyman with being a remarkable medium. The Ghost Club at this stage was a much smaller and more private body, attracting people such as Sir William Crookes and WB Yeats. They would meet every so often in London to privately discuss the latest in ghosts, but were perhaps more occult-orientated. They researched traditions and referred to each other as Brother Ghost. It continued in this manner until the 1930s, and by this time the club had begun to attract a number of significant younger researchers, such as Harry Price. Price would later become world famous for investigating Borley Rectory, a case that he worked on for 20 years and that people are still arguing about to this day. In 1938 Price then relaunched the club as a kind of society dining circle that met regularly during World War II. After Price's death in 1948, The Ghost Club suspended itself for four years until 1952, when Phillip Pool (a Fleet Street journalist) once again revived the club. That club has carried on, more or less, ever since. During the last 60-odd years The Ghost Club has typically involved investigations into allegedly haunted houses and talks by a wide range of speakers on all kinds of fascinating topics from all points of view.


Reverend Stainton Moses revived The Ghost Club in 1882

2x Images source: The Ghost Club

What kind of investigations does The Ghost Club undertake?

We've conducted investigations around the country, in numerous settings, although there is one interesting exception: graveyards – we don't get many accounts of haunted graveyards these days. We have, however, looked into reports of phenomena in all kinds of domestic, public and historic buildings. These investigations are quite contrary to the sort of thing that gets televised. My predecessor Tom Perrott, who was chairman for 29 years, stated that the only equipment he took on most cases was a notebook, a pencil and a sympathetic ear. Not everything that people may think of as being paranormal is necessarily so. We had an investigation in the 1990s at the House Of Detention, which is a historic prison-turned-museum in Clerkenwell in central London, we've been into the undercroft of Battle Abbey, and then of course there's been callouts from private dwellings and houses. I've had one or two experiences during investigations, mostly involving noises or object movement that I can't explain. A number of our members do investigate things on their own account as well as with The Ghost Club, but we don't have any ghost-detecting devices. We would have solved problems in science, philosophy and theology if we did!

THE DARK HISTORY of the VICTORIANS

Future PLC Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA

Editorial
Group Editor **Philippa Grafton**
Art Editor **Jon Wells**
Compiled by **Alice Pattillo & Jon Wells**
Head of Art & Design **Greg Whitaker**
Editorial Director **Jon White**
Managing Director **Grainne McKenna**

All About History Editorial
Editor **Jonathan Gordon**
Art Editor **Kym Winters**

Cover images
Getty, Alamy, Joe Cummings, The Art Agency

Photography
All copyrights and trademarks are recognised and respected

Advertising
Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director **Clare Dove**

International
Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**
licensing@futurenet.com
www.futurecontenthub.com

Circulation
Head of Newstrade **Tim Mathers**

Production
Head of Production **Mark Constance**
Production Project Manager **Matthew Eglinton**
Advertising Production Manager **Joanne Crosby**
Digital Editions Controller **Jason Hudson**
Production Managers **Keely Miller, Nola Cokely,**
Vivienne Calvert, Fran Twentyman

Printed in the UK

Distributed by Marketforce,
www.marketforce.co.uk – For enquiries, please email:
mfcommunications@futurenet.com

Dark History of the Victorians Second Edition (AHB6503)
© 2025 Future Publishing Limited

We are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from responsibly managed, certified forestry and chlorine-free manufacture. The paper in this bookazine was sourced and produced from sustainable managed forests, conforming to strict environmental and socioeconomic standards.

All contents © 2025 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

FUTURE

Connectors.
Creators.
Experience
Makers.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

Chief Executive Officer **Jon Steinberg**
Non-Executive Chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief Financial Officer **Sharjeel Suleman**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

Part of the
ALL ABOUT HISTORY
bookazine series

Widely Recycled

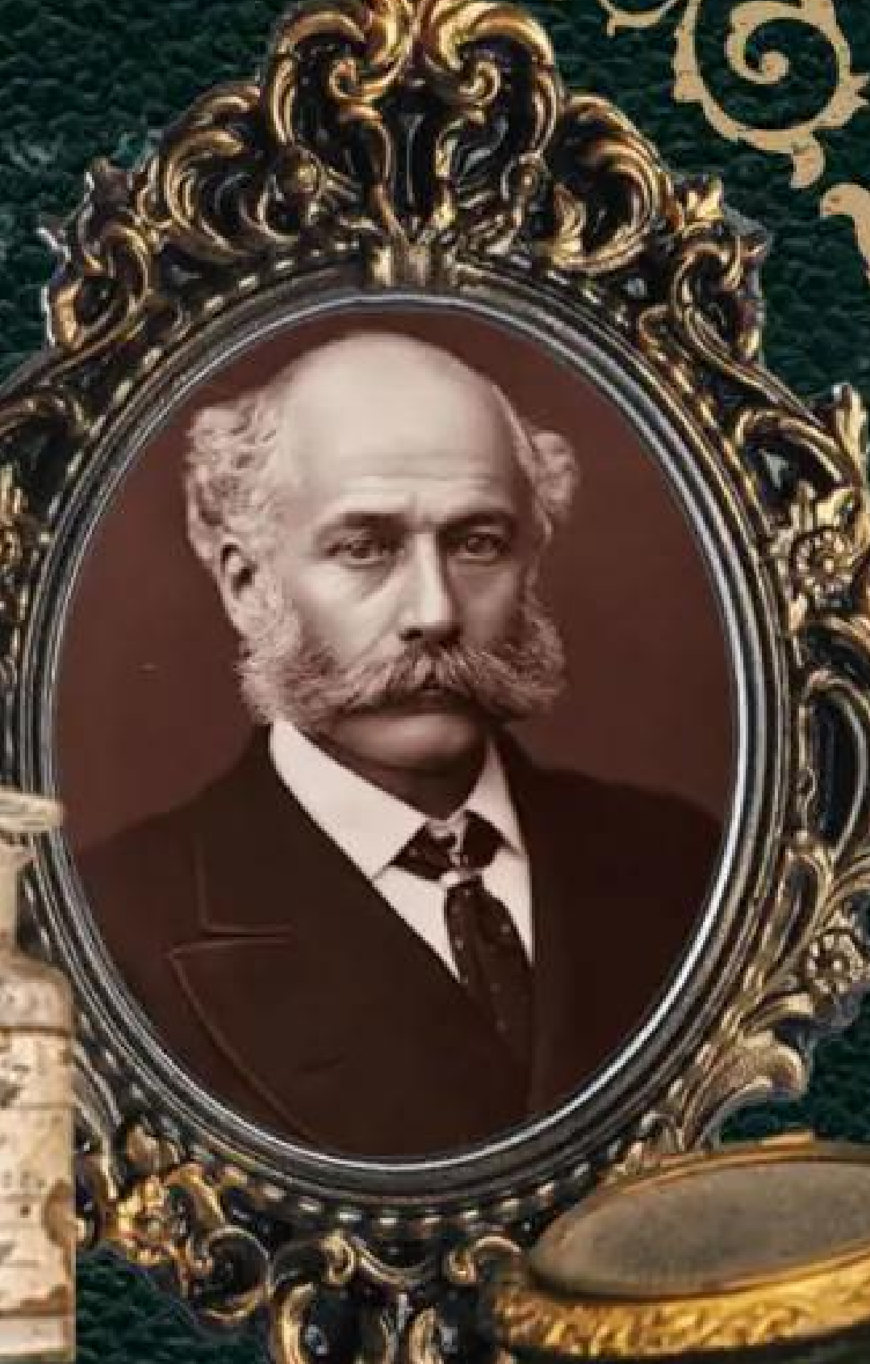
ipso. Regulated

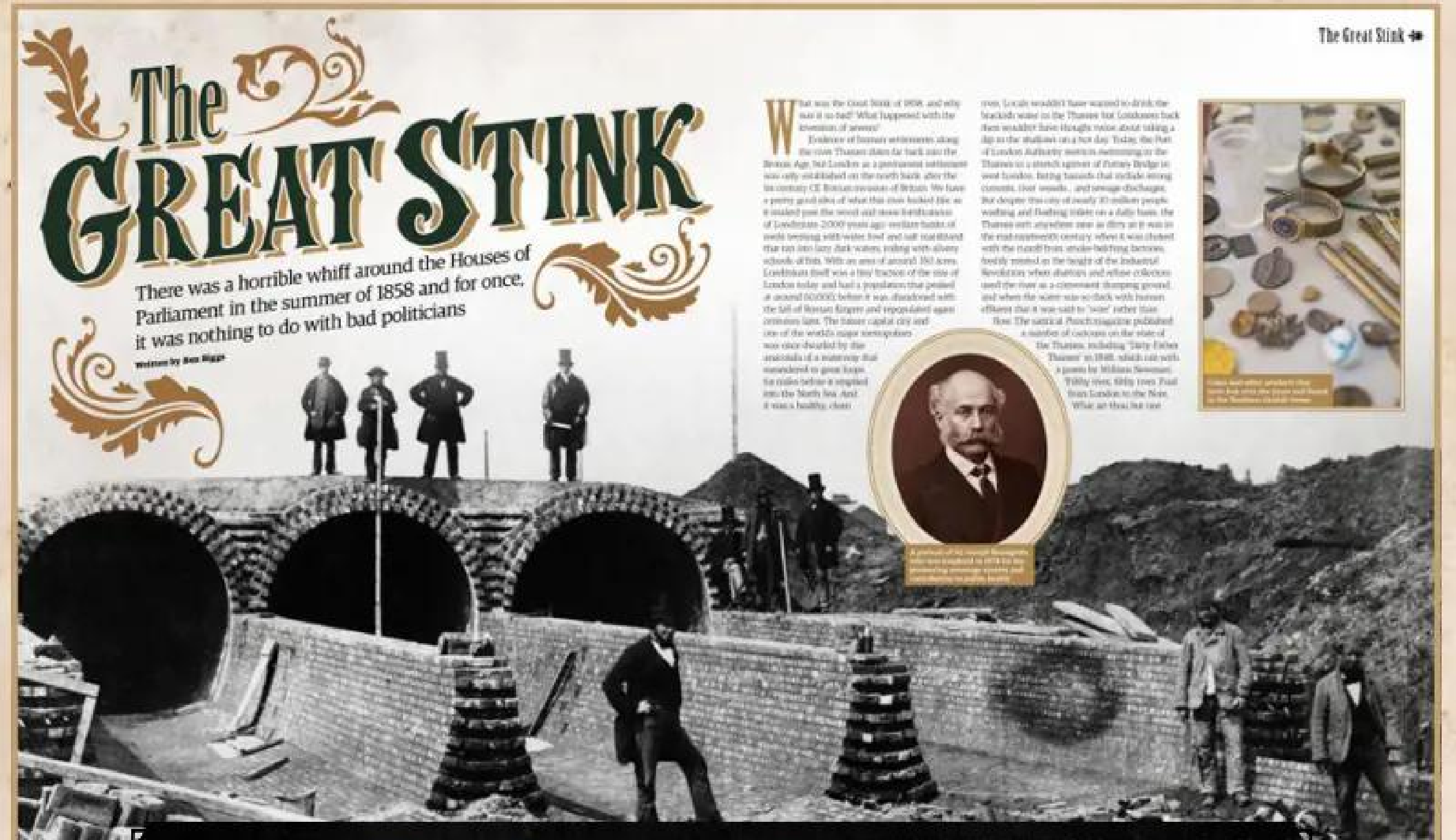
V

ROUGH ON RATS
RATS
ROU
OUR OCCUPATION GONE "ROUGH ON RATS" Did it

THE DARK HISTORY of the VICTORIANS

From opium dens to freak shows, discover the sinister side of Victorian life



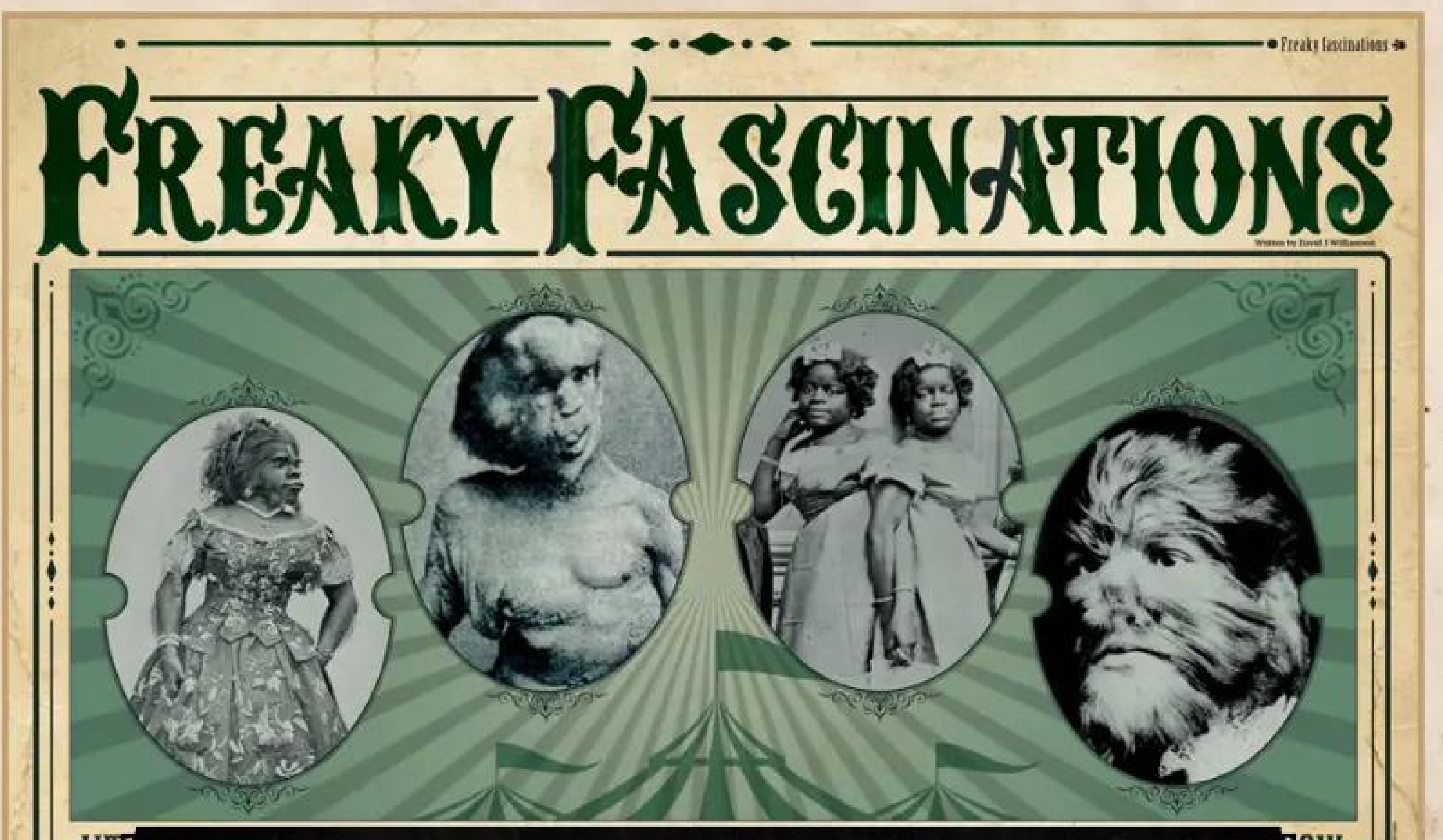

The Great Stink

The GREAT STINK

There was a horrible whiff around the Houses of Parliament in the summer of 1858 and for once, it was nothing to do with bad politicians

London's reeking river

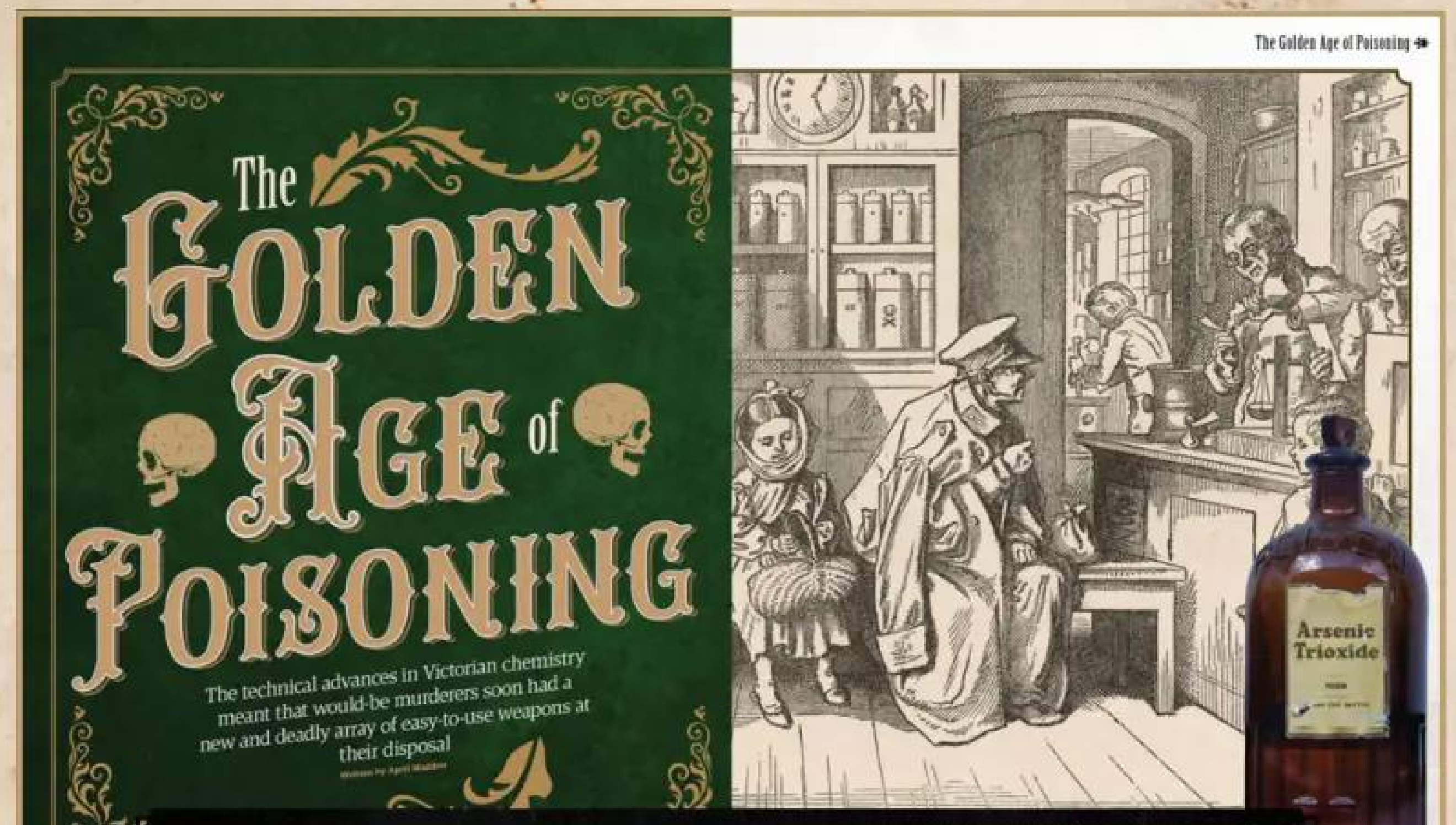
In the summer of 1858, there was no avoiding the foul stench of the Thames


Freaky fascinations

FREAKY FASCINATIONS

Victorian freak shows

How Queen Victoria's royal seal of approval paved the way for human exhibits


The Golden Age of Poisoning

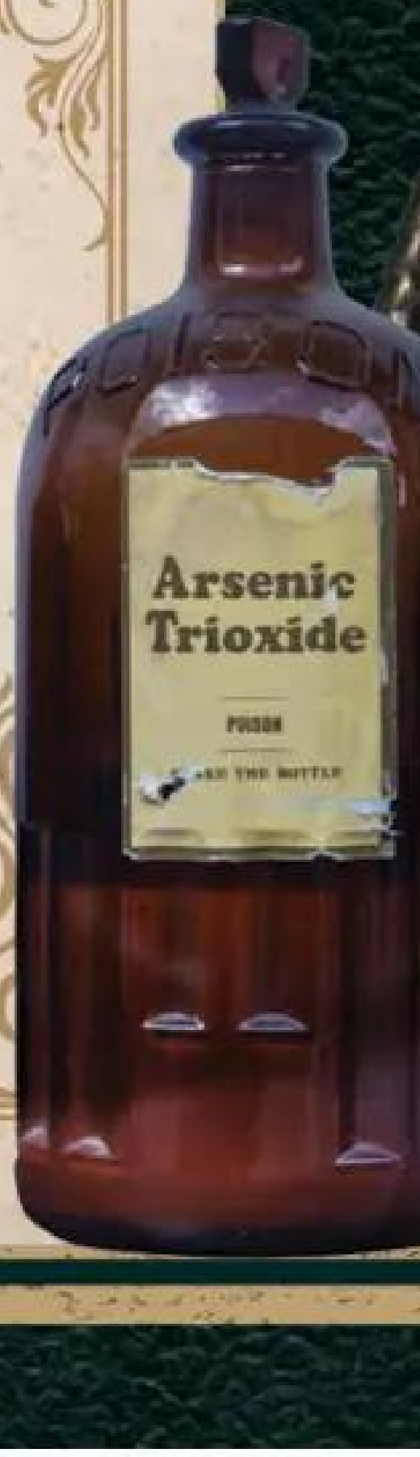
The GOLDEN AGE of POISONING

The technical advances in Victorian chemistry meant that would-be murderers soon had a new and deadly array of easy-to-use weapons at their disposal

Arsenic Trioxide

Killing with chemistry

Would-be murderers had a new and deadly array of weapons at their disposal


Arsenic Trioxide

BOOKAZINE

9021
9000